

# *Philippians 3:4-7*

*Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 8/19/2007*

## **Marks of a True Believer: A look at Paul's Testimony Part 2**

### **Prayer**

Father, thank You so much for this opportunity to come together as a body to worship You. And we pray that the proclamation of Your Word would bring You glory and honor; that it would bring You glory through a Spirit-led response in our hearts and lives; that those who do not know you here today would be convicted and that they would be rescued from death into life. And that those who know You, Lord God, would be convicted also to walk more closely with Your Son so that He will be glorified. Father, I ask You to bless Your Word as it goes out. Give me the ability to share it, not within my own strength, Lord God, but by Your power and strength, that everything that is said will bring You glory now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Sermon**

Well, often after people come to faith in Jesus Christ, they are sometimes asked to give their testimonies. And the testimony is simply the same word as "witness." They are giving witness to what has happened in their lives. And many times, the testimonies we hear are wonderful and beautiful because we see that testimony is not a testimony about them. It's a testimony about Christ. But often, we hear testimonies about what so-and-so did and this and that, and it's all about the person. Those types of testimonies grieve me, and I hope they grieve you. Now, within the testimonies that glorify God, the ones about Christ, often we hear of wretched sinners who God has come and intervened through the Gospel, and caused them to fall on their knees and repent before the Lord. And they have become saved. And we praise God for those testimonies, that there's a clear change, from wickedness, or from darkness to light. We see that. But we do not hear many testimonies from those who live good and righteous lives and then come to Christ. We do not hear many testimonies of those who say, "I did everything pretty much right on the outside." We do not hear many testimonies like that, where people are willing to admit, ultimately because of Christ, that all of their goodness was like filthy rags. But today, we are going to see and we are going to take a look at the testimony of the apostle Paul. And I believe we are going to continue to see the marks of a true believer in Philippians 3. And we are going to look at verses 4-7 today. And the whole passage is actually 1-11, so Lordwilling we will hit the second half next week. But remember that it's all together. A couple of weeks ago, we went through Philippians 3:1-3, and that is tied together with what we will see today.

And just to remind each and every one of us of the context of Philippians, the apostle Paul is writing from Rome. He is in house arrest. He is in chains. And he is writing to this dear church that has supported him, that has sent someone to help him- Epaphroditus. And he loves them, and they love him. This is one of the prison epistles. We call them the prison epistles; Colossians, Philippians, Ephesians, Philemon. It is most likely written around 62 AD, ten years after the church at Philippi was

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formed. We know how the church of Philippi was formed from Acts 16, as Paul and Silas came there and shared. And they met a lady at the river, Lydia. They shared the Gospel with her, and she was saved and her household. They were eventually run out of the town there and put in jail, in prison. And they were singing hymns and God freed them from their jail. And the Philippian jailer said, "What must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." And he believed. And then it says they shared the Word and his household believed. And we have the beginning of the Philippian church ten years before this letter. And Paul writes this letter, and he is so thankful for God's past work in these Philippians. It is genuine; they are truly saints. They truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And he is thankful. But he is also confident in that thankfulness that God will complete the work that He has begun.

And Paul writes to them to help (maybe) alleviate some of their misunderstandings. They might be thinking that his chains are hindering the Gospel, but he shares with them that God is using his chains for the greater furtherance of the Gospel. That God is being magnified and glorified through his trials. And we see that that's all that Paul desires; he desires God to be glorified and magnified. And ultimately, Paul shares his mindset- to live here in the flesh is Christ, to live is for Christ. To die is gain because he will be with Christ. And we see that Paul recognized that everything God was allowing, he desired to magnify Christ in the situations. And then, I believe, he starts to exhort the Philippians in the same way, to walk in a worthy manner as citizens of heaven. As we saw a few months ago, they were to stand firm in the Truth. They were to strive together in the Truth and they were to not be afraid of that opposition to the Truth.

And then Paul exhorted them in chapter 2 on how to walk in a manner worthy in unity. That unity ultimately comes from being of the same mind, having the same thinking. Having this attitude, or mind, which was in Christ Jesus. This mind of considering others as more important than self, not lifting up your own agenda, your own desires but ultimately seeing others as more important. That is the mind of Christ. And as long as we are focused on our own pursuits and agenda, there is going to be disunity and disharmony and all kinds of wickedness, as James would say.

Do you remember what we saw in the last few verses the last few weeks? Paul said, "Make my joy complete by being of the same mind." And he shared that example of Christ as I just shared. The example of Christ, who humbly and obediently became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. The example of perfect humility. And we saw, ultimately, that there is no way that we could be and think this way apart from having the mind of Christ working in us through the Word of God. And we had the first commands after being given the example of Christ.

***<sup>12</sup> So then, my beloved, (Chapter 2, verse 12) just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup> for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. [Philippians 2:12-13]***

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Obey because God is at work in you. And then he gave the command to do all things without complaining and grumbling. Do not grumble. That is an evidence that you do not recognize that God is at work in you through your circumstances, through your situations. Don't complain and argue. We saw that was a terrible thing. And then Paul gave three examples of those who walked in humility, first himself. And then we had Timothy and Epaphroditus. And that brought us to chapter 3, where he says, "And now for the rest of the things." He is going to share finally. He is really saying, "As to the rest". He's not done but he has got more to say.

And we saw a couple weeks ago how to keep from being ensnared or entrapped by false teaching. We saw we need to have the right attitude. We need to be rejoicing in the Lord; when we are grumbling about our circumstances, we are not rejoicing. We are in a position to be taken captive by bad teaching that comes along to help us in the midst of our grumbling. We are supposed to also heed the warnings. Paul said that it was no trouble for him to remind them of these things, and it was a safeguard for them. But what he reminding them of? He says in Philippians 3, we have verse 1 here. Let me turn here. He says,

***<sup>1</sup>Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. <sup>2</sup>Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; [Philippians 3:1-2]***

We saw that. We saw that there are those who actually work evil. There are those who are like vicious dogs. There are those who are false. And we saw in 2 Corinthians 11 that these false teachers disguise themselves as workers of righteousness, as servants of Christ. And Paul says, "Beware." And then through contrast, he is going to show what true believers look like versus those who are false. Verse 3.

***<sup>3</sup>for we (Paul and the apostles) are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, [Philippians 3:3]***

Three identifying marks of true believers- worship in the Spirit of God. They do not worship in their flesh, dancing around, fulfilling their own desires. They worship in the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God through the Word of God produces a response of worship to the Living God. Glory in Christ Jesus. They do not glory in their own attributes and their own things they have done. They glory in what Christ has done. And lastly, and inter-related, they put no confidence in the flesh.

And at this point, Paul now is going to share his testimony. It keys on that last statement, "who put no confidence in the flesh." And so now we get to our passage today in which, I believe, we are going to see Paul's mindset before Christ, that he was confident in self. And Paul's mindset when he came to Christ. And then next week we will see his current mindset. Again, chapter 3 and we will start at verse 1.

***<sup>1</sup>Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things {again} is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. <sup>2</sup>Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; <sup>3</sup>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 (and now***

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our passage) <sup>4</sup>**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: <sup>5</sup>circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. <sup>7</sup>But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.** (That's where we'll go today, but I want to keep reading to verse 11.) <sup>8</sup>**More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish** (And that word literally is "dung" and I will refer to that later on today because what we will see next week is related to what we are going to see today. He counts it as rubbish or refuse or dung.) **in order that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup>and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from {the} Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which {comes} from God on the basis of faith, <sup>10</sup>that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; <sup>11</sup>in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. [Philippians 3:1-11]**

So then, first of all, we are going to see Paul's mindset before Christ. He is comparing himself to those false teachers who actually are bragging in their accomplishments. They are trusting in themselves, they are relying on their own flesh. And he says, verse 4,

**<sup>4</sup>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: [Philippians 3:4]**

Now with that in mind, we need to remember and recognize who Paul is addressing. Who are these false teachers at this time? We shared the last time we went in chapter 3, verses 1-3 that they were most likely Judaizers. Well, what is a Judaizer? It is someone who would claim to follow Jesus Christ but yet would add and require works from the Law. It was ultimately a Christ-plus theology. Yeah, they believed in Jesus Christ by faith in Jesus Christ but then they said "You have got to get circumcised, too." They would add in to what Christ had done. It was Christ-plus. And Paul warned throughout Scripture concerning those who would have this type of attitude.

Now, we wonder why and how is this a threat to the Philippians, because they are already saved? We talked about this last time, that those who say Christ-plus certainly is a threat to salvation but it is a threat also to our sanctification. To our growth in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul tells them to beware. Do you remember what he said in Galatians chapter 3, verse 1? I will read this for you.

**<sup>1</sup>You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? <sup>2</sup>This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? <sup>3</sup>Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? [Galatians 3:1]**

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Bad guys were trying to come in and set up systems for following Jesus Christ, and we have nothing different today as we see a Christ-for-today-only, a Christ that fills your needs rather than a Christ that calls you to die to self and live for Him. And the warnings are throughout Scripture concerning those who would come alongside and try to divert and steer believers away from the simplicity of a devotion to Christ. Now, notice in verse 4 Paul before salvation had great reason to boast about his 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.” This term “I myself” in Greek is emphatic. He is saying, “I had great reason to be confident.” And this word “confidence” comes from the Greek word *peitho* which really speaks of being persuaded or being convinced or being sure or being certain. It really is used as a synonym for “faith”. Confident faith. And it was used earlier in chapter 1, verse 6. Verse 14 of chapter 1, verse 14 of chapter 1, verse 24 of chapter 2. We saw it in the end of verse 3 in chapter 3, that true believers put no confidence, or *peitho*, in the flesh. Paul says, ultimately, here he is uniquely qualified to speak to the issue of fleshly confidence. He’s uniquely qualified to address this fleshly confidence that the Judaizers were endangering the Philippians’ faith with. Ok, so, with that in mind, we see ultimately that Paul is saying he had many more reasons to put confidence in the flesh.

Middle of verse 4.

***If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: [Philippians 3:4b]***

Paul, as we will see, had a tremendous resume. A tremendous religious resume. And we are going to see his former confidence in verses 5 and 6. Let’s read 4 again.

***<sup>4</sup>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: (now here, he is going to go with his qualifications) <sup>5</sup>circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; [Philippians 3:4-5]***

I believe we are going to see Paul was confident in his fleshly heritage. He begins saying, “circumcised the eighth day.” And what’s the significance of this? Paul was not a proselyte. He was not a late convert to Judaism, like probably many of these false teachers. He had gone through the rite of circumcision on the eighth day as prescribed by the Law. And if you remember, we saw in verse 1-3 of this same chapter that there were the false circumcision. Verse 2.

***<sup>2</sup>Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision (or the mutilators, he says); <sup>3</sup>for we are the {true} circumcision, [Philippians 3:2-3a]***

Now, some of you are going, “What in the world is circumcision? What is that all about?” Well, just briefly, if you remember it was a sign of the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 17. And it was always an outward symbol of an inward reality. It never held any merit within itself. As we know in Deuteronomy chapter 10 and Deuteronomy 30, that God tells the Israelites to circumcise their hearts. That they were to be changed, and it was a symbol that they were changed and that they were God’s people because of a changed heart. They were to love the Lord God with all their heart, mind and soul.

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They were to have circumcised hearts. But yet, false brethren, the false circumcision, those always who mutilate the truth made it an outward focus rather than a symbol of an inward reality. We see that today in many things- baptism, the emphasis being made on the outward symbol rather than the true reality of what it represents. We see this same thing being done in the Catholic church concerning communion, where they focus on the symbol and the remembrance and they give power to that rather than what is behind that- that Christ's once-for-all sacrifice has brought grace. We see that the mutilators and the false, those who are false, always make symbols more important than the substance. And ultimately (Colossians 2) the substance is Christ.

We have these truths that God commands us to be baptized, but it is an outward symbol. God commands us to remember Him here, but it is an outward symbol. Now, on some levels we can become complacent at times, where we think our coming to church is what pleases God rather than a changed heart that desires to please God by being obedient and going to church. It's a very subtle twist from something that God says we should do, and it is the motivation behind it. And these Judaizers relied upon circumcision and they boasted in it. And Paul says, "Hey! I have just as much more reason to boast in it; I was circumcised the eighth day," he says. And we are going to see here ultimately, later on, Paul considers boasting in that for salvation as rubbish or dung. It is worthless. It is worthless.

And as we go on, we see he was circumcised the eighth day here, and it says, "Of the nation of Israel." The word *genos* means "nation" or "race". He was Israelite by race. He was of pure Jewish lineage. And he used to have confidence in that, and Jews would have confidence in their lineage. There are many Jews that believe that because they are born pure Jews that they are saved. They believe that is why they are saved. And I am sure Paul felt the same way, that he was set apart because he was of the nation of Israel. And he is saying, "I am of pure Jewish lineage." And that he used to boast and have confidence in that.

But ultimately, we will see that he believes truthfully, after meeting Christ on the road to Damascus, that it was worthless. That trusting in that was worthless. There was a value to him being Jew, there was a value to that. But ultimately, for salvation it was worthless. Salvation is not gained through one's physical birth. It is not gained through one's physical birth. And folks, we have that error today that has subtly come into the church. There are those who believe in infant baptism. Now, these who would believe such rubbish, as Paul will share, twist the Philippian jailer's story, assuming that saved parents have saved children because of that passage. That they are born into a covenant relationship with God, and they are identified in that covenant through infant baptism. Some type of household salvation by virtue of that parents' faith. And Paul is saying here he was of the nation of Israel, he was born into it. And ultimately, it is rubbish. And the same thing for us- just because we are born in a Christian family, just because we have heard the gospel all our lives does not save us. Paul was born of the nation of Israel.

And also, we see next that he was of the tribe of Benjamin. Now, it's important to note the point he is making out of this we might not catch why he shares he is of the tribe of Benjamin. To a Jew, the tribe of Benjamin was a very high-ranking tribe. Certainly, Judah was to a Christian the highest ranking tribe,

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ultimately, because Christ came through the line of Judah. And it was also a high ranking tribe because the kings came through Judah. But Benjamin was right up there in the Jewish mind of a high ranking tribe. And we see there are reasons why they believed that Benjamin was a very high ranking tribe.

First of all, Jacob's son Benjamin was the only son to be born in the Promise Land. They took stock in that; Genesis 35. Secondly, when Israel would go to battle, Benjamin would go in the forefront. They would be the most courageous; they would be out front. Judges 5:14 and Hosea 5:8. And from whom did Israel look, what tribe did they look from to seek the King? From Benjamin. And they sought Saul, their first king, Paul's namesake. And also, in Judges 1:21, it reveals that in the allotment of the land, Benjamin received the portion of land that included the Holy City Jerusalem. Benjamin was a high ranking tribe. And we know that when the kingdoms split (when the ten Northern Tribes split off because of their sin, and because of ultimately Solomon's sin) after he (speaking of Solomon) had died, we see that there were two tribes that did not defect- Judah and Benjamin. And if you remember Mordecai (that God used in the story of Esther, the true story to preserve Israel) was a Benjamite. In the Jew's eye, being of the tribe of Benjamin was a very important thing, and Benjamin had a very high ranking. And Paul is saying, "Hey! Circumcised the eighth day, pure Jewish lineage, tribe of Benjamin." All these accomplishments that he could put on the wall religiously, he is going to share that they all are worthless when it comes to knowing Christ. Paul had a great confidence in his fleshly heritage before he came to Christ. And most likely, his heritage was much greater than the Judaizers of his day because most of the records had been lost during the deportation; there were not many people who could track their pure Jewish lineage.

And now continuing, we see that he says he is a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was a devout son of a devout family. Acts 22 recounts how his family sent him, basically, to study Jewish orthodoxy under Gamaliel. He was "thoroughly trained by him in the Law." Paul was a pure-bred Hebrew. He was not a new-comer. He was not a Hellenistic, worldly type Jew. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. Much of the Jews had taken on the Greek world, and they had become Hellenistic Jews in a sense. Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, understanding the Hebrew dialect which many did not even know anymore. In essence, he was like a "PK" or a pastor's kid who was raised to be a pastor from birth, basically. Paul had great confidence in his heritage but as we will see, there is no saving power in your heritage. There is no religious virtue gained by birth. So Paul had great confidence in this heritage before coming to Christ.

And folks, there are many like Paul, or should I say Saul? People who are raised in the church, raised in a denomination. Those whose faith rests on their parents. And it is not genuine, folks who have fallen into the trap of trusting in their own spiritual heritage. When I pastored a church in Waterford, California, a church where the entire board had come to faith and they were in a dead denomination. I mean dead; they didn't believe the truths about Jesus Christ. They were dead because they were not saved. And the board had gotten saved as they heard the Word of God, and they wanted to have the Word taught and they wanted to graciously lead the denomination. The trouble we came into were those who were not saved; those who believe it was because they were brethren that they were saved. They had grown up in this church, and they believed that that was why they were saved, because they were good brethren. But folks, spiritual heritage does not save you. I want to ask you, are you trusting in the ritual or right

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heritage? Some people say, "Well, I was baptized at this point?" I say, "When did you come to Christ?" "I was baptized." And immediately, I say, "Not saved." If that's your answer today, if I say, "When did you believe in Jesus Christ?" and you say, "I was baptized this day." I say to you today you are not saved because baptism does not save you. It is Jesus Christ, as we will see, who saves you.

Paul had confidence in his fleshly heritage, but he saw (ultimately, after meeting Christ) that it was worthless. That it was dung. It was all loss. He thought it was gain; he thought it was on the plus side. And maybe some of you think it's on the plus side, between you and God. But when you truly meet Christ, you will see it is on the minus side.

Ok. Next we see Paul had confidence, I believe, in his religiousness. End of verse 5.

## ***...as to the Law, a Pharisee; [Philippians 3:5b]***

Paul is saying he was confident in the context of the Law because he was a Pharisee. We see his religious accomplishments. And the term "Pharisee" literally meant "separated one." The Pharisees came into existence during the 400 years, what we call the inter-testamental period- between the deportation, the end of the writing of the Word of God (ultimately the Old Testament) and when Christ came, we have Christ coming. And during this time, in Jewish history, the Jews were becoming (as I shared) more like Greeks. And there were those who decided they wanted to be separate. And the Pharisees arose as a strict sect against the advancement of Greek philosophy among the Jews. They were focused clearly on the Law of God, but as we see they were not saved. They had huge logs in their eyes, as they were looking for the specks. The Pharisees became separatists who focused on meticulous observance of the Law. And they added their own practices, some 600 extra little laws, to the Law so that they could do the laws, ultimately. And that is what happens when you do not have Christ; you have to add in a whole system of things to do when you do not know Christ. And there were people coming along these Philippians, trying to do that to them.

Now at this time, there were only about 6,000 Pharisees and Paul says, "As to the Law, a Pharisee." That was quite a high attainment. Paul had attained a high religious position. Galatians 1:14.

***I was advancing in Judaism (Paul says) beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. [Galatians 1:14]***

Paul had reached the pinnacle of religiousness, and he was proud of his commitment to the Law. He was proud of his commitment to what is true. But yet, as we will see, he considered even that as worthless. As dung. It was a minus on the spiritual ledger sheet, not a plus. How about you? Do you see your actions, your observances, your commitment to the Word as what makes you righteous before God? Folks, it is not what you do that makes you righteous. It is Who you truly know, and when you come into a relationship with Jesus Christ (knowing Him by confessing and repenting of your sin and believing in Him) we come into a relationship with Christ, and we are given the righteousness of Christ, not because of what we do but because of what He did. You know, just because you are in the garage does not mean you are a car. Just because you go to church does not mean you are a Christian. Just because you

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observe commandments or the Golden Rule or pray or read your Bible, it does not make you a Christian. It is actually a minus. It is a detriment to coming to Christ, as we will see.

Now, I believe closely related, we see Paul had also a confidence in his fleshly sincerity. Verse 6.

**<sup>6</sup>as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; [Philippians 3:6a]**

Paul was zealous for God. Paul sincerely believed he was persecuting the enemies of God. He sincerely believed that. He was zealous. He was a persecutor of the church. And his zeal led him to persecute and kill Christians- Acts 8:1. I will read that for you.

**<sup>1</sup> And Saul was in hearty agreement (This was after Stephen was put to death.) with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. <sup>2</sup> And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup> But Saul (That's Paul's name before he became a Christian.) began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. <sup>4</sup> Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. [Acts 8:1-3]**

A side note, in Acts, whenever there was persecution, the Word advanced. And so, we always pray, "No persecution, Lord, please" but that is one of the means that God uses to advance His Word.

But here, we see "as to zealousness", Paul was a persecutor of the church. Folks, you can be very sincere and be sincerely wrong. Paul's case: he would count his zeal as dung later, as worthlessness. One pastor writes,

*The world is filled with the religiously sincere, people very sincere in their religion, make great effort, personal sacrifice, high cost, pay the price...wanting to please God. Very sincere. Go to church, some people, every day...every day, many Catholics go every day. People in religions pray certain prayers every day. Protestants go to church on the Lord's day...fulfilling a function. Very sincere in their heart, wanting to do what is right. God is not impressed. God is not impressed. Salvation does not come by sincerity. You can have a lot of zeal and be absolutely wrong, and Paul says, "I thought it was right, I considered it garbage when I met Christ."*

Paul had reason to boast in his zeal and fleshly sincerity. And folks, there are many people who want to sincerely please God but they are sincerely wrong because they are not submitting to the Word of God. Maybe they do not know it out of ignorance, or they have rejected the God of the Word. When I went to seminary, there were many sincere people focused on evangelism but their sincerity was sincerely wrong because every method they used was not Biblical and it damages the church. And they are like those that Paul says "beware of". You can be sincere but sincerely wrong.

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Paul also had confidence, as we will see, in the result of all this which was his own fleshly righteousness. Back to verse 6.

***<sup>6</sup>as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. [Philippians 3:6]***

Outwardly, Paul was blameless. He was faultless; you looked at his life, and he had every “I” dotted and every “t” crossed. He was blameless as to the Law of God. He was externally righteous. What Paul means here is that by the standard of external Law-keeping, he was without fault. And he had invested an enormous amount of energy in keeping the details of the Law. And he was, in the eyes of his Jewish colleagues, without fault.

And folks, so many people believe it is what you do that saves you, and he felt that what he did brought righteousness. Listen to a crazy statement about Ted Turner, concerning what he thinks in terms of what he does. It says,

*Turner has called Christianity a religion for losers, though he says he is not impious because he has read the Bible through more than once and has been born again at least seven times. He says, “Look at my philanthropy! The Bible says it’s better to give than receive. I sponsored the religious conference at the UN. It cost me \$600,000.” He continues, “So I’m living like a Christian. I guarantee you I’ll see me [in heaven]. I’ll be like the guy who has the last two tickets in the stadium. I’ve lived a really good life. I’m going to say, ‘Hey, St. Peter, remember God’s & Generals? This movie is a final bit of insurance that I get in.”*

Basically, he is saying what many people say, and it’s hilarious when we look at it from our point of view, to see how crazy it is to think that those things would save you. But there are some of you out here that believe that there are things that you have done that will bring salvation, that God will say, “Wow. Wow, you are impressing Me. That is really good. Ok, that is fine.” But God is not impressed with any of us.

***<sup>6</sup>For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 6:23]***

Paul had an external righteousness far greater than Ted Turner. But he would find that on the road to Damascus (and later write about) “Because of the works of the Law, no flesh will be justified in His sight. For through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.” He counted his works-righteousness as worthless. He thought it was a plus in his sheet before God; it was a minus. It is not a plus. Now, Paul had an incredible list of things to put confidence in- his heritage, his religiousness, his righteousness. Yet something happened to Paul, and Bob read this earlier. Acts 26. As we have Paul before King Agrippa. Verse 12.

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<sup>12</sup> **"While thus engaged** (speaking of persecution) **as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,** <sup>13</sup> **at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.** <sup>14</sup> **"And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'** <sup>15</sup> **"And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?'** (That is very telling; that shows you that Paul is not saved. He did not know it was Jesus; he did not know the Lord.) **And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.** <sup>16</sup> **'But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;** <sup>17</sup> **delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you,** <sup>18</sup> **to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me. '** (Jesus says) **[Acts 26:12-18]**

It is clear that Paul did not know Christ when he had a ledger sheet of all the good stuff he thought were pluses. "Who art Thou, Lord?" He did not know it was Jesus. He did not know Christ. And Jesus said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Some of you are very zealous. Some of you have a long list of things you think is going to benefit you before God. But nothing apart from the work of Christ is beneficial, as we will see.

Let's take a look at Paul's mindset at conversion. Verse 7.

**<sup>7</sup>But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [Philippians 3:7]**

Now, Paul recounts in the past how he thought. And we will see the verb tenses in 7 and 8 are basically past tenses. "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as lost." That verb "were" there is in perfect tense. And what does that mean? It is continual action in the past. In the past, Paul continually believed that these things were gain. And for you, some of you continually believe that your baptism is gain for you. But Paul says, "But whatever things, all that list- heritage, religiousness, sincerity- were gain to me, those things I have counted as lost."

These things that were advantaged, profits, on this ledger sheet- they are all lost. In contrast he says, "But whatever things were gain to me, those I have counted..." The word speaks of "making a decision after weighing the facts." Considering or thinking or having an opinion about. Regarding. He made the decision ultimately after meeting Christ, as we will see, that all of those things were loss. "I have counted"- perfect tense. Well, what does that mean? An action in the past which has results to the present. At a point in the past, Paul says, "It is all loss." And he still believes that to this day. Whatever were gain, continually for me in the past, those things I have in the past counted, and still believe, are loss. Paul used to see his religious heritage, his religious sincerity, his resulting external righteousness as

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gain. He continually thought of those things as on the plus side, but now after coming to Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul met Jesus (the Jesus he didn't know) and recognized they were actually loss. That word "loss" speaks of lost at sea, total loss. Total loss.

Greg Herrik writes, "It was not until he had his Damascus road experience that he came to realize the bankruptcy of such blind religious dedication."

Jesus had said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." They are bankrupt. They recognize their bankruptcy; they don't have a slate of positive things they have done before God. But they will inherit the Kingdom of God.

Herrick continues, "Never in his wildest dreams did he regard his efforts or works as dung—not until, that is, he met Christ. Then he understood the truth of it all! How many of us can say the same thing!"

So, why did Paul consider his heritage, which was true, his religiousness, his sincerity, and his righteousness in the Law as dung? Let's read verse 7 again.

***<sup>7</sup>But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss (Why?) for the sake of Christ. [Philippians 3:7]***

Everything Paul considered gain in the context of a relationship with God before, now for the sake of Christ (or literally on account of Christ; because of Christ) "I consider them as loss."

Folks, it is only when one encounters the living Lord that they realize all their righteous works are as filthy rags. It is because of Christ that Paul counted those things loss. And I tell you today that if you put your confidence in anything other than Jesus Christ alone, you have not met Jesus; you do not know Him. You do not know Him. And He does not know you. What did Jesus say to those who did all kinds of religious things in Matthew 7, verse 21?

***<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> "Many will say to Me on that day, (Paul would have been one of those, maybe) 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' [Matthew 7:21-23]***

So how did the apostle Paul respond when confronted by the living Christ? He recognized all of his accomplishments were nothing in view of the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ.

I want to ask you, what does your spiritual ledger sheet look like? What things in your heart of hearts do you have on the plus side? What things are on the minus side? In any way, shape or form do you have on your plus side maybe serving the poor? Maybe baptism? Maybe it is communion? Maybe it is sacraments? Maybe it is your giving? Maybe it is church attendance? Maybe it is you are a good worker

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at work? Maybe it is through knowledge of the Bible? Maybe it is because you are a religious figure? Do you count those things as gain in your relationship with God?

Folks, if anything other than Christ is on your plus side you are in trouble. You are in trouble. I will tell you that right now. And for those who have heard the gospel and reject it and continue to trust in their own righteousness, here is what God says to you today. Hebrews 10:26.

**<sup>26</sup> For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth,** (The full knowledge. The knowledge of Christ. You need a Savior; Jesus Christ is the Savior) **there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. <sup>29</sup> How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? <sup>30</sup> For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." <sup>31</sup>It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. [Hebrews 10:26-31]**

If your ledger sheet has anything on there about yourself, if you have confidence, if you believe the false teachers that He says "beware of" (those who put confidence in the flesh, who tell you to take the sacraments, who tell you to do this so that you will be right before God, who tell you to be baptized so that you will be right before God) if you believe that, you are in deep trouble. But God is a gracious God, a loving God, a kind God, a faithful God. And He is faithful to bring the Word of God to you, the good news, the gospel concerning Jesus Christ that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, that the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through... Law keeping? Baptism? Sacraments? Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

What is your spiritual ledger sheet look like? Where do you place your confidence? It will determine your destiny. If you place your confidence in men or flesh, you are in deep trouble. Jeremiah shares this, the same Jeremiah that said, "Great is Thy faithfulness." Jeremiah 17, verse 5.

**<sup>5</sup> Thus says the LORD,** (this is the LORD) **"Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD."** (Are you turning away from the Lord?) [Jeremiah 17:5]

**<sup>7</sup> "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD." [Jeremiah 17:7]**

We have seen Paul's mindset before Christ; he trusted in his own righteousness. We have seen what happened to him on the road to Damascus, that his spiritual ledger sheet was completely reversed. And that is a sign and an evidence that you have truly been saved, when you recognize all your accomplishments are as nothing before God. And it is only what Christ has done which brings salvation.

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This is the test. If you do not see your works as worthless concerning salvation, you have not met Christ. You have not met Him. When Paul met Him, he recognized that impressive sheet of things that he could brag upon were worthless.

Now for those of us who are believers, you are wondering, "Ok, I trust Christ completely. How does this apply to me?" Remember this letter is being written to the Philippian church. It is a body of believers. They have already been saved. The threat is not to their salvation. The threat is to their sanctification. Well, what do I mean? We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ as we hear the gospel. Faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the Word of God. But we are also sanctified or set apart or grow closer to Jesus by the Word of God. And false teachers will come alongside and get you to trust in yourselves in that process, to add those things to Christ and His Word. And we need to beware. And Paul is sharing his testimony to help us beware of false teachers. To beware of those who place their confidence in the flesh rather than in Christ. 2 Corinthians chapter 3; let's turn there together as we close. 2 Corinthians 3, verse 4.

***<sup>4</sup> And such confidence (peitho, same word, confidence.) we have through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup> Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God. [2 Corinthians 3:4-5]***

That is the mindset of someone who has been saved, and there are those who will come along and tempt you to believe you are adequate, that you are able to live the Christian life, that the Christian life is about you rather than about Christ. And folks, we need to recognize that all of our effort apart from Christ is worthless. That apart from Him we can do nothing. And to trust in our Lord Jesus Christ who is faithful. "And such confidence we have through Christ towards God, not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves but our adequacy is from God."

## Prayer

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You that You clearly show us through the testimony of your servant Paul that confidence in anything other than your Son Jesus is worthless. I pray for anyone here who has placed confidence in anything other than Christ for salvation, that they would repent of that. That they would confess that sin to You. That they would call out for a Savior, Jesus Christ. And Father, I pray for those of us who have placed our confidence in Christ, that we would keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and by Your strength and power not give into the temptation to trust in ourselves. To have confidence in ourselves in any way. May we not buy into the lies that are permeating the church these days concerning how it is all about us rather than it truly being about your Son Jesus. Father, thank You for your Word. May it work mightily in our hearts. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

## *Philippians 3:4-7*

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