

The Most Profitable Transaction — Part 1. Forsaking the Worthless Things – Philippians 3:4-7

Introduction and Outline

- Scripture reading: Philippians 3:1-21
- the main issue addressed in this chapter: true Christians vs. false Christians. The key difference: putting confidence in the Lord vs. in the flesh.
- In verses 4-11, Paul uses his own experience of salvation as an example to illustrate the heart change of true believers. The key of this transformation is a transaction, for the Greek terms for “gain” and “loss” (vv. 7-8) are accounting terms. Salvation can be seen as *a transaction in the heart*, including **forsaking the worthless things** and **gaining the priceless treasure**. Verses 4-7 are the former, and 8-11 are the latter. The key is a total change of values!
- This passage supplements Acts 9 and together they tell the full story of Paul’s conversion. Acts 9 is the external call, and here is the internal transformation. Every believer has a different story of the external call, but they all experience the same internal transformation!
- Outline:
 - Title : The Most Profitable Transaction — Part 1. Forsaking the Worthless Things
 - 1. Summary of Worthless Things — The Flesh (v 4)
 - 2. List of Worthless Things (vv 5-6)
 - a. Ritual Ceremony Is Worthless
 - b. Family Background Is Worthless
 - c. Cultural Tradition Is Worthless
 - d. Religious Label Is Worthless
 - e. Zealous Behavior Is Worthless
 - f. Legalistic Achievement Is Worthless
 - 3. Disposal of Worthless Things (v 7)

Summary of Worthless Things — The Flesh (v 4)

- “Put confidence in the flesh”: The “flesh” summarizes the things in verse 7, where Paul says “whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” The flesh is all external behaviors. To put confidence in the flesh is to put your faith on these external things, thinking they are the credentials that win you salvation with God so you can escape hell and go to heaven.

Examples of putting confidence in the flesh: certain conversion experiences, moral achievements, head-knowledge of the truth, active participation in the church...

- “I far more”: This is in comparison to the Judaizers who boast in the flesh. In all these external appearances they boast about, I, Paul, am no inferior to them at all! Philippians, don't fall pray to their spiritual intimidation!

List of Worthless Things (vv 5-6)

Ritual Ceremony Is Worthless

- "circumcised on the eighth day": a requirement for all Israelites in Leviticus 12:3. It's the external ritual by which they identify with God's people.

Analogy: Baptism. “Pastor so and so baptized me on such and such a day, and my baptism certificate is still lying somewhere in my house.” Yes, Christians must be baptized, but to trust baptism for your salvation is to put confidence in the flesh.

Family Background Is Worthless

- "of the nation of Israel": God's special chosen people (cf. Ex. 19:6, Deut. 7:6). The Jews said boldly to Jesus, "We are Abraham's descendants" (John 8:33), meaning we don't need you to teach us how to enter the kingdom of heaven; we were born into the kingdom of heaven by our very birth!
- “of the tribe of Benjamin”: This tribe is highly esteemed among the Jews. Benjamin is Jacob's youngest son, born in the land of Canaan, and his father loved him; Jerusalem was in the territory of Benjamin (Joshua 18:28); Mordecai, who saved the Jews from a crisis of extinction, was a Benjaminite (Esther 2:5).

Analogy: “My parents are Christians. My grandma took me to church when I was little.” In fact, many PKs (pastor's kids) and MKs (missionary's kids) don't know the Lord at all and have no life of salvation. Family background have nothing to do with personal salvation.

Cultural Tradition Is Worthless

- “a Hebrew of Hebrews”: The previous point is about pedigree, this point is about culture. "Hebrews" refers to orthodox Jews who have inherited the culture of their ancestors and have not been assimilated by Greek culture (cf. Acts 6:1). Having an origin doesn't mean having its culture. Paul not only had pure Jewish blood, but also followed pure Jewish culture, including language.

Analogy: "I went to church with my parents when I was little. Grandma's been telling me Bible stories since I can remember. I still go to church a lot, read the Bible and pray, etc." In

effect, this is saying, you see, my life is deeply influenced by Christian culture, so surely I'm saved.

Religious Label Is Worthless

- “as to the Law, a Pharisee”: The original word "Pharisee" means to be separated. The original intention of this sect was very good. They wanted to be separated from the filth of the world and to uphold a godly lifestyle with strict legal standards. Many of them were scribes who specialized in the law, similar to today's seminary professors.

Analogy: The Amish separate themselves from the world, for fear that the filth of the world may defile them. Whether you are Amish, Catholic, Reformed, Baptist, Lutheran, non-denominational, whether you are an M.Div., Doctor of Theology, elder, or deacon, no religious label can earn you salvation with God.

Zealous Behavior Is Worthless

- “as to zeal, a persecutor of the church”: Zeal is intense love and hate, so intense as if the heart is on fire. It is a strong love-hate feeling, loving someone so strongly as to hate everything that harms him.

Zeal for God is a great spiritual virtue (e.g., Jesus in John 2:17). Lack of zeal is called lukewarm and calls for repentance (e.g., the church in Laodicea, Rev. 3:19). But Paul's zeal was "not in accordance with knowledge" (Romans 10:2). He thought that church was God's enemy, so he tried hard to persecute the church! Zeal is to love and to hate with a passion! Some people say, I only have love, no hate. To be honest, you are worse than Paul before he was converted!

Analogy: Every religion has fanatics. The monks who live in temples with their heads shaved bald, the lamas who make pilgrimages bowing to the ground with every step they take, the extreme Muslims who turn their bodies into bombs... These are typical examples of boasting in religious zeal. In the church, pursuing Christ zealously is good, but are you basing your faith on it for salvation? If so, it is the boasting in the flesh.

Legalistic Achievement Is Worthless

- “as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.”: The "Pharisee" label mentioned above is about legal standards, and the "righteousness in the law" here refers to the actual act of keeping the law. Paul lived up to the law so well that he could claim to be blameless! It doesn't mean that he is flawless from the inside out according to God's perfect standard, otherwise he wouldn't need a Savior; it means from human perspective no one can lay a charge on him and accuse him of violating the OT law.

Analogy: If you are the kind of person who never cheats or gets drunk or commits sexual immorality, who goes to church every week and gives half salary to church every month and has devotional time every day, I thank God for you. But, take heed. Have these external appearances become the credential for boasting in your heart? Did they steal the value of Christ in your heart?

Disposal of Worthless Things (v 7)

- “whatever things were gain to me”: The above fleshly credentials were once like shining medals, lined up in a row on that garment Paul put on. How cool! How glorious!
- “those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ”: A total change of values. All the things in the “gain” column must be moved over to the “loss” column. The whole algorithm is wrong and he must reevaluate the gains and losses of life!

"counted as" does not imply any contradiction to objective fact. The value of Jesus *is* supreme, and everything *is* rubbish compared to him. But Paul uses this verb to emphasize his *personal* assessment of value. What is your assessment of value? The Lord Jesus said, "For what good will it do a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul?"

Conclusion

Have you ever had such a change of values? Is He the only pearl you long for, or is He just one of the many jewels in your treasure chest? Jesus said to follow Him one must be willing to give up everything for Him, which means you may give up your family, house, property, and even life.

The young ruler in the Gospels came to Jesus seeking eternal life. He kept the OT law from youth up and was likely as blameless as Paul. His wealth seems to prove he is very blessed by God. But he knew he had no eternal life. Jesus asked him to give all his possessions to the poor and follow Him, and he went away grieving. **The young ruler met Jesus, and his values did not change. Paul met Jesus, and his values were totally flipped. What is the treasure of your heart?**