

PAUL...An Example To Be Followed Philippians 3:4-11

In these verses, Paul gives a *dramatic* and *compelling salvation* and *lordship testimony*. It's one of the most significant statements of the *doctrine of salvation* and *lordship* in Scripture, revealing the internal transformational work of God in a truly *repentant* and *believing sinner*. Acts 9 provides the historic record of Paul's *conversion*...

“Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.’ The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.”

~Acts 9:1-8

Salvation is a *sovereign act* of God in which He *conquers* the *blindness of a sinner* with the *glorious light of His truth*... and *redeems* them. That day on the **Damascus Road**, the living Christ *broke through* the *spiritual blindness* of the *proud, self-righteous Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus*. As a result, his *trust* in his *religious accomplishments* was *shattered*, and the *roots* of his *self-confidence* were *forever uprooted*...as *conviction* and *truth* flooded his darkened soul.

Paul spent his life accumulating what he imagined was *personally earned righteousness* that would *achieve salvation*. But when he met Christ, he realized that all those things were actually *worthless* and *meaningless*. He *exchanged* it all for the *righteousness* that comes from God on the *basis of faith*. That *exchange* is the theme of this passage.

Paul speaks of *salvation* as a *transaction* or *exchange*. He even uses *business* and *accounting terminology* in verses 7-8, which forms the heart of the passage. This is where we get the “*exchanged life*” principle. Jesus described *salvation* as an *exchange of all that the sinner is for all that Christ is*.

I. PAUL'S PAST...Meaningless: (vs. 4-6)

If anyone could have achieved *salvation* by *self-effort*, it would have been Paul. His *impressive credentials* enabled him to emphatically declare...**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 (vs. 4).**

He didn't make that seemingly *prideful statement* to *boost* his *ego*, or to *claim spiritual superiority* over others. He understood the *foolishness of boasting* and did so only for the *sake of argument*. When he understood the *Gospel of Christ*, he realized that all of these *credentials, achievements, privileges, and rights* were *meaningless*.

Circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless (vs. 5-6)...

Circumcised the eighth day...Paul begins with circumcision because that was the *major issue* for *Judaizers*. Unlike some of the *Judaizers*, Paul wasn't a *Gentile proselyte to Judaism*...he was a *Jew by birth* and *followed*

the Jewish rituals from the beginning...on the eighth day. At the proper time, he had gone through the *ceremony* that *initiated* him into the *covenant people*.

Paul included *circumcision*, the most *essential rite* in *Judaism*, to emphasize that *salvation doesn't come by any ritual or ceremony...whether it be infant baptism, or adult baptism*, taking of the *Lord's Supper, Catholic mass*, or taking of the *sacraments...even circumcision*.

Of the nation of Israel...This is pointed to those *Gentile converts* to *Judaism*. Paul was *by birth a member of God's chosen people*. As such, he *inherited all the blessings* of being part of the *covenant nation*.

This emphasized that Paul was a *physical descendant* of **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...**a *heritage* that the *Jewish people relied on*, along with *circumcision*, for *salvation*. But *heritage*, like *circumcision*, is *unable to save anyone*. No standing with God is *gained by birth*.

Of the tribe of Benjamin...The **tribe of Benjamin** was one of the *most prominent tribes* in **Israel**. **Benjamin** was the *younger of the two sons* born to **Jacob's favorite wife Rachel**. He was also *the last* of **Jacob's sons** to be born and the *only one born* in the **Promised Land**. When the **Promised Land** was *divided* among the *twelve tribes*, **Jerusalem** was included in **Benjamin's territory** (**Judges 1:21**). When the *kingdom was divided*, only **Benjamin** and **Judah** *remained loyal* to God. Thus, the **tribe of Benjamin** was one of the *most noble* in **Israel**.

A Hebrew of Hebrews...This is a declaration that as he *grew into manhood*, Paul *strictly maintained* his family's *traditional Jewish heritage*. He was *very committed* to the *language, orthodox traditions, and customs* of his *ancestors...even studying under the famous rabbi*

Gamaliel. Paul's *zealous devotion* to his *Jewish heritage* was widely known.

"So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion."

~Acts 26:4-5

As to the Law, a Pharisee...Paul pursued his *Jewish heritage* to the *extreme*. He was *so zealous* for the *Law* that he became a **Pharisee**. To become a **Pharisee** was to reach the *highest level in devout, legalistic Judaism*. To be a **Pharisee** was to be a member of an *elite, influential, and highly respected* group of men who *meticulously lived to know, interpret, guard, and obey the Law*.

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church...The *Jews* viewed **zeal** as the *supreme religious virtue*. The *intensity* of **Paul's zeal** can be seen in the degree to which he *persecuted the church*. After **Stephen** was *stoned to death*, Paul...

"Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him (Stephen) to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison."

~Acts 8:1-3

Later...

“Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

~Acts 9:1-2

Paul’s zeal for God led him to *relentlessly, unsparingly,* and *mercilessly* try to *eradicate Christianity*.

As to the **righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless**...Those who would have observed Paul’s life would have found his *behavior blameless...above reproach*. By all outward appearances, Paul was to the people who knew him *a model Jew* who lived by *Jewish law*. He seemed to *have it all*. He had undergone the *proper rituals*, he was a *member of God’s chosen people*, he was from a *favored tribe in Israel*, he had *meticulously maintained* his *orthodox heritage*, he was one of the *most devout legalist* in *Judaism*, he was *zealous* to the point that he *persecuted Christians*, and he *rigidly conformed* to the *outward requirements of Judaism*. Yet he saw that all of that was *useless for salvation*...that *salvation* comes *by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone*.

II. PAUL’S PRESENT POSITION...Counting the cost: (vs. 7-9)

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ (vs. 7)... This verse sums up the *dramatic change* that took place in Paul’s *perspective* when he met Christ. All of the *cherished treasures* he thought were *positives*...suddenly became *deficits*. Those things that he *wrongly imagined* would earn him *eternal life* were *replaced* by the *true benefits* that were his *in Christ*.

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (vs. 8a)...

This verse *strongly emphasizes* the *contrast* between the *religious credits* that *do not impress* God and the *countless benefits* of knowing Christ.

I count all things to be loss...This phrase indicates that all the *meritorious works* that Paul had counted on to *earn God’s favor*, and any that he might do *now* or in the *future*, are but **loss**.

In view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...The *surpassing knowledge* of Christ described here is *far more than mere intellectual knowledge* of facts about Him. It’s knowing Christ *experientially* by *personal involvement*...by having a *personal relationship*.

For whom I have suffered the loss of all things (vs. 8b)...For the *immeasurable privilege* of knowing Jesus Christ, Paul gladly *gave up everything* in his past that he sought to *earn salvation* and *God’s favor*.

And count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ (vs. 8c)...He went so far as to **count them but rubbish**.

Rubbish...Gk. *skubalon*, a very strong word that could also be rendered *waste, dung, manure*, or even *excrement*. Paul expressed in the *strongest possible language* his *utter disdain* for all the *religious credits* that he had sought to *impress* both man and God. In view of the *surpassing value of knowing* Christ, they were *worthless*.

And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law (vs. 9a)...Paul spent his adult life *futilely* trying to obtain a **righteousness** of his own merit **derived from the Law**...one of *self-effort, external morality, religious ritual, and moral good works*.

And although he did his best, **Paul** still fell far short of God's *standard*.

But that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (vs. 9b)...Again...**Paul** is emphasizing **faith**.

Faith...the *confident* and *continuous confession of total dependence on, and trust in, Jesus Christ as the necessary requirement to enter God's kingdom*. It involves more than mere *intellectual assent* to the truth of the Gospel... *saving faith* is *trust* in Jesus Christ alone...and then *surrender* to His lordship.

Righteousness...is a *right standing with God* and *acceptance by Him*. It's that *imputed righteousness* of Christ to *repentance sinners* that is the heart of the Gospel.

"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

~II Corinthians 5:21

III. PAUL'S PREFERENCE...Experiencing God personally: (vs. 10-11)

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead (vs. 10-11)...

That I may know Him...Paul had already mentioned the *deep, experiential knowledge* of Jesus Christ that comes at *salvation*, but now the *cry of his heart* was that he could pursue an even *deeper knowledge* and *understanding* of His Savior. To **know** Christ *above everything else*. This gives that picture of a *personal relationship*.

"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

~John 17:3

And the power of His resurrection...Paul knew that there was *no power* in the *Law*. He also knew that there was *no power* in his *flesh* to *overcome temptation* and *sin*. But because he **knew** Christ, and had His *righteousness imputed* to him...he longed for the *power* that *resurrected* Jesus...the *power* of the Holy Spirit.

The **resurrection** was the greatest display of God's *power*. It revealed His *absolute power* over both the *physical* and *spiritual realms*.

"In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him."

~Colossians 2:11-15

And the fellowship of His sufferings...The *deepest moments* of *spiritual fellowship* with the living Christ are at times of *intense sufferings*. **Suffering drives** believers to Him.

Suffering reveals...(I Peter 4:12-19)

- *Devotion.*
- *Dedication.*
- *Discipline...refinement.*

Being conformed to His death...Paul, as we all are, was conformed to His death at *salvation*. But he has more in mind here...he is looking to a *deep partnership* and *communion* with Christ...a life!

Conformed...Gk. *summorphos*, a compound verb. *Sum...* means *together with*. *Morphos...* means *formed*. Paul wanted to be *formed together* in Christ. **Romans 8:29**, *to the image of God...Philippians 3:21*, *to His body in glory*.

“Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.”

~Romans 6:4-10

In order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead...

A *final* and *consummate benefit* Paul obtained when he met Christ was the *guarantee* of his *future resurrection*.

“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on the immortal. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

~I Corinthians 15:52-57

What do we as believers gain by our union with Christ?

- *Knowing* and *experiencing* God as a result of our *identification* with Him.
- The *righteousness* of Christ *imputed* to us in *justification*.
- The power of Christ for our *sanctification*.
- Participation in the *sufferings* of Christ.
- And sharing Christ’s *glory* in our *glorification*.

No wonder Paul gladly exchanged past religious efforts for the surpassing benefits of knowing Christ.

THE LESSON WE NEED TO LEARN:

Everyone stands at the same CROSSROADS...knowing that everyone will stand before God one day. You can cling to your RELIGIOUS ACCLAIMS and follow the rich young ruler onto the BROAD PATH that leads to ETERNAL DESTRUCTION...or you can forsake all HUMAN EFFORTS in favor of the surpassing benefits of KNOWING CHRIST and follow Paul onto the NARROW PATH that leads to ETERNAL LIFE.