

Religious Credits that Don't Impress God

Philippians 3:4-8

50-31

We come in this particular message to Philippians chapter 3, and I want to read for you verses 4-11. Though we will not cover the whole section, I want to read it to you, and then we will discuss the first half of it this morning and the second half next time, and I'll describe what I mean in detail in a moment. Philippians chapter 3 and verse 4, Paul writes:

“Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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 in order that I may gain Christ, 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, 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.”

Now, in those marvelous verses is one of the great personal testimonies in the New Testament. It is also one of the most significant statements on the matter of salvation found in the New Testament. It is Paul's own testimony as to the dramatic attitude that occurred in his mind at the juncture at which he met the living Christ. It takes us into the very heart of the sinner's attitude in conversion.

And you will notice as we read that Paul sees this matter of salvation from the viewpoint of a transaction, or an exchange. He even uses business and accounting terminology. The heart of the passage is in verses 7-8, and you will notice in verse 7 the word “gain” is used, *kerdos*. It means “profit,” and if you were an accountant you would indicate this as the term to describe the profit column. That's what its use is related to.

You will also notice in verse 7 the word “loss.” Again that word *zēmia* is used in extrabiblical Greek to describe a business loss, and so this would be the loss column. So the apostle Paul is talking about profit and loss. You will notice also in verse 7 the word “counted.” That word, *hēgeomai*, means “to count” or “account” or “reckon.”

So Paul here is talking about a business transaction that involved a profit column and a loss column. There were certain things which he felt were in the profit column, which he switched over to the loss column when he met Christ. In fact, he says very clearly in verse 7, “Whatever things were profit,

those things I have counted as loss." Now what you have here is a transaction. You have the apostle Paul spending a lifetime accumulating spiritual profits and filling up a column of spiritual profit, banking on that column of spiritual profit to earn him salvation. That's what he means in verse 9 by the "righteousness of my own derived from the Law."

So there he has his profit column filled up by which he hopes to earn salvation. But he encounters Jesus Christ. And upon encountering Jesus Christ he comes across, verse 9, "a righteousness not his own...but righteousness which comes through faith in Christ." And instantaneously he counts everything that he once saw as profit as loss and gives it all up in order to gain Christ. He realizes that everything he had been accumulating to buy his way into the kingdom was "rubbish." That's the word he uses in verse 8, "rubbish." And he gives it all up for Christ.

Salvation, then, was a transaction. Here was a Jew. Here was a pedigree Jew. Here was the ultimate Jew with all of the credentials, who looks at all of his Jewish credentials and assumes that he has thereby gained entrance into the kingdom and impressed God greatly, only to find out in confronting the living Christ that all of that which he assessed as profit was in fact garbage, loss, detriment, negative. And he willingly gives it all up for Christ, exchanging a righteousness which he thought he could earn but couldn't for a righteousness which God gave through faith. That's the theme of this great passage.

And what Paul is saying is that "I am willing to give up trusting what was once valuable to me as a means of salvation to trust Christ instead." It is an exchange, and that's what salvation is. It is self-denial. Jesus said, "Deny yourself and follow Me." In other words, "Consider all that you have attained as useless, worthless, and follow Me."

This particular attitude is described most magnificently in the words of Jesus. Turn with me to Matthew chapter 13, and here we have from the very lips of our Lord Himself the clear insight into what Paul is saying in his personal testimony. In Matthew chapter 13, and verse 44, the Lord Jesus says this: "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field." Now the phrase "the kingdom of heaven" means "the sphere where God rules." That is the sphere of salvation. We could even use the word "salvation," so let's read it that way: "Salvation is like a treasure hidden in the field." We could even say Christ the Savior "is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

Now the idea is this: you have a man who has accumulated wealth. He has accumulated a certain profit. He has certain possessions. But he stumbles across a treasure that is so valuable that he will gladly give away everything that he has to get that treasure. That's the exchange. He will sell everything, liquidate it to gain that true treasure.

Verse 45, the same idea is given in another parable, "The kingdom of heaven" - or the sphere of salvation - "is like a merchant seeking fine pearls." Here is a man who is going around seeking fine pearls. The assumption is that he has accumulated a lot, he has many possessions, he may have many pearls. But verse 46, "upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it." And again you have the same idea. Here is a man who has accumulated much but sees it as worthless when compared to the great value of the pearl that he discovers.

A man with many possessions finds a treasure, gives up all his possessions for the treasure. A man

with many pearls gives up his pearls for the one pearl of great price. This is the exchange. We accumulate a lot in our life, and we assume that it has value, and we tag it with certain value. But when compared with Christ it is "rubbish." Such was the teaching of Jesus, and such was the experience of Paul. Of the experience of Paul, F. B. Meyer writes, "He was a man with a rich religious nature, capable of an infinite hunger after God who passed from one stall to another amid the religions of the world seeking for the best. But finally when he came where the gem of heaven and earth and sea, the pearl of great price, lay, translucent and glistening, he gladly sacrificed all he possessed to win it," end quote.

That's exactly what Paul is saying here. That's exactly what Jesus said salvation was all about. The attitude of a man at the crux of salvation is "I will give up everything I have depended on to earn my favor with God for Christ. I'll give it all up."

The word "rubbish" deserves our attention. You will note it there in verse 8 at the end of the verse. He considers everything that was in the profit column as "rubbish." It is the word *skubalon*. The word refers either to human excrement or to garbage thrown away - something useless, waste, rejected, filth, refuse. Some Bibles translate it "dung." Some Bibles translate it "manure." Some say "rubbish." Some might even say "garbage." Some might say "waste." But Paul is saying, "All of my profit column I saw to be manure, useless, waste. Get rid of it. It has no value."

That is a very strong statement when you consider what was in his profit column. What was in his profit column is listed in verses 5-6, and there are some pretty heavy-duty credentials there. But Paul treats them all as if they were manure, absolutely useless. Now listen, vice - listen carefully - vice is not the only muck of life. Vice is not the only useless refuse. Vice is not the only garbage. Vice is not the only "rubbish." Religion is "rubbish," too. Any man-made effort to gain salvation is as much "rubbish" as vice is "rubbish." And Paul is speaking out of personal experience. He said that Christ saved him, and he said, "I was the chief of sinners." And listen, he was "the chief of sinners" not because he lived a vice-filled, lewd, licentious life, because he didn't. He lived an eminently moral life. But he saw the deepest, vilest rubbish of life as religion, not immorality. It's one thing to act immorally. It's something else to believe that God is so low that you can earn acceptance with Him. One desecrates God to one degree. The other desecrates God to a greater degree. One violates His law, immorality. One assumes Him to be less than He is and violates His nature. Thus religion is a "rubbish." And the "rubbish" that Paul viewed in his own life was not the rubbish of vice, but it was the rubbish of religion, of trying to please God through self-effort and religious works.

Now Paul is giving his personal testimony, starting in verse 4. Why does he do that? Well, at the end of verse 3 he said that true Christians "put no confidence in the flesh." True Christians do not trust in anything they do to earn salvation. They "put no confidence" - zero confidence - "in the flesh." True Christians, those who have "the true circumcision," which is a spiritual circumcision, they "worship in the Spirit of God," verse 3 says, and their joy and their glory and their boasting is all "in Christ Jesus," and they "put no confidence in the flesh," none whatsoever. The flesh provides nothing, even when it acts religiously. There are people, plenty of them - the world is filled with them - who live under the deceptive illusion that they can work their way to God, that by religious duty and ceremony and all of that they can earn their way into God's presence - they can acquire the privilege of eternal life. That's "confidence in the flesh." Paul says true believers have none of it. Paul wants none of that illusion.

Now remember the Philippians were being assaulted and pelted by a group known as Judaizers. These were Jewish people or people in the Jewish religion who believed in Christ to some degree,

but also believed that in order to be saved you had to be physically circumcised and keep all the laws of Moses. And so they came into the church at Philippi and they said, "You people who are believing in Christ and thinking that's enough for salvation are wrong. You must be circumcised and you must keep all the Mosaic law." And so they were imposing upon these believers this twofold emphasis - circumcision and the Mosaic law. Paul then is writing and saying, "Beware," verse 2, "of those people. They are dogs; they are evil workers; they are the false circumcision. Beware of them. Don't let them push this off on you. True Christians worship in the Spirit of God. Rejoice in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, that is in circumcision or works." And he wants it made clear. What he is saying here is Christians are the true covenant people, and these Judaizers are not.

Now, having said that in verse 3 he anticipates their reaction. What's going to happen? The Christians are going to say, "Boy, Paul, you've really made it clear here. We're to have no confidence in the flesh." And the Christians are going to say to the Judaizers, "Hey, Paul says have no confidence in the flesh." And what are the Judaizers going to say? Well, they're going to say something like this; they're going to say, "*Ha*, well you're a Christian. You don't understand the value of Jewishness. You don't understand the privileges of Judaism because you're a Gentile Christian. And what does Paul know? Paul's a Christian, too. What does he know about this?"

So Paul wants to settle that once and for all. So what he does is he recounts all his Jewish credentials. And in effect what he is saying is, "Look, I can tell you 'put no confidence in the flesh' as one who has every reason to have confidence in the flesh. And you can't say, 'I'm a Christian so what do I know.' I am first before I was a Christian a Jew, and I am a Jew of Jews. I know the privileges of Jewishness. I know the benefits of Judaism. I have experienced it all. And I am telling you out of that experience it is rubbish." He is not disparaging Judaism because he is jealous of something he doesn't have. He's not disparaging Judaism because he is envious of what someone else has. He is not depreciating Jewishness in the sense he couldn't have it so he's going to castigate everyone who does. Not at all. He is saying, "I've been there. I've stood on that same ground. I have impeccable Jewish religious credentials, and I can tell you 'put no confidence in the flesh.' It is garbage; It is garbage. It is waste. It is useless, profitless."

For every advantage that these Jews could claim, he could claim the same thing. They could say, "Oh, it's a great thing, boy, when you follow the law. It's a great thing when you're zealous for the law of God. It's a great thing when you go through circumcision and all of that - it's a great thing. What do you know? You're Gentiles. It's a great thing."

Paul says, "I know, and I know it very well; and I know it first hand, and it's garbage." That's what he's saying.

Now let's look at his testimony in verse 4. "Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh." The end of verse 3 says, "Christians, don't put any confidence in the flesh, although I myself" - that's an emphatic form there - "might have confidence even in the flesh. I mean, it's not that I don't know what I'm talking about. Listen, if there was confidence in the flesh, I might have it, I might have it. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I *far more* than anyone else." Literally "to a higher degree." Certainly to a higher degree than most if not all of the Judaizers who were plaguing Philippi. So he is saying, "If there was anybody who should have confidence in the flesh legitimately, it would be me. And if anybody else has a mind to have confidence in the flesh, I have more reason to have it."

Now he's not saying this to build his ego. He's not saying this to convince people of his spiritual superiority. He is simply saying it for the sake of argument. He doesn't really want to boast in his flesh. He doesn't really have any confidence in his flesh. In 2 Corinthians read chapter 11, verse 16, through chapter 12, verse 1, sometime, and he uses the same argument of boasting there, but he calls it "foolish." "It's foolish to boast. I only do it for the sake of making a point, just for the sake of argument." He says, "If anybody might boast in the flesh it would be me, because of my impeccable Jewish credentials, my religious credentials."

You see, he knew what it was to be a Jew, to be a Jew in the highest sense of the term, and yet he deliberately, knowingly, willingly abandoned it all for the sake of Jesus Christ. He counted it all as worthless. He sold it all to gain the true treasure, the true pearl, even Christ. Now in verses 4-7 he tells what was loss, and in verses 8-11 what was gain. And in the middle is Christ. He says this is what was loss, verses 4-7, and this is what was gain in Christ. "I gave up all this stuff, and this is what I gained." Next week we'll look at verses 8-11 and see what was gain in Christ. But now let's look at what was loss.

Now keep this in mind. It didn't start out as loss. It was all in his profit column. It was all his profit, his credentials, his Jewish achievements, privileges, and rights. But he saw Christ, and he understood the gospel, and he realized it was useless.

I'd like to entitle this message, "Religious Credits that Don't Impress God," "Religious Credits that Don't Impress God." Paul is saying, "In every sense I'm an authentic Jew. I have a consummate pedigree. I have had it all, but I consider it worthless when it comes to Christ, because none of it can gain salvation."

Do you understand that's his point? He isn't saying it's of no value socially. He's not saying it's of no value educationally. He's not saying it's of no value historically. He's saying it's no value salvifically, to borrow an old theological word. "It can't save you; it can't redeem you. But if it could, I could boast in it." And he is saying how foolish it is to boast in your religious credits. And by the way - listen to me carefully when I say this - most of the people in the world believe they will attain eternal life by accumulating religious credits. Most of the world believes that. The only people who don't are Christians; the rest do. They are deceived. And that is particularly true among Jews, because there is Old Testament precedent for their religion. And so they believe if they live by that they are amassing in the profit column the credits that impress God and by which He will grant them salvation. Paul says, "*Not so!* It is manure; it is waste; it is garbage, worthless. Because I have discovered," he says, "in my encounter with the living Christ that salvation is by grace through faith. It has nothing to do with what you have received by way of heritage. It has nothing to do with human effort. It has nothing to do with religious duties. It has all to do with Christ, all to do with Christ."

So, here is his list of things once considered profit, now considered loss. And they are all his Jewish credentials. Look at verse 5, and I'm going to give you seven points. I want you to get them very carefully. They go by very fast, just brief.

Number one: salvation is not by ritual, salvation is not by ritual. He says, "The first thing that was profit to me and I came to count as loss was that I was 'circumcised the eighth day.'" Now the literal Greek reads this way: "With respect to circumcision, an eighth-dayer." "With respect to circumcision I was an eighth-dayer." You say, "What does he mean by that?" Well, in Genesis 17:12, Genesis 21:4, Leviticus 12:31, God institutes circumcision, that physical operation as a sign of His people. And He

said it is to be done on the eighth day after a male child is born. That was a strict Jewish rite. And what is Paul saying? He's saying, "Hey, with regard to me, I went by the Mosaic book. I was circumcised on the eighth day. I went through *the* basic ritual of Judaism, the rite and ceremony by which you are initiated into the covenant people." And by the way, he uses that one first because circumcision was the Judaizers' big issue.

So he says, "I'm no Ishmaelite." Ishmael, you'll remember, wasn't circumcised till after his thirteenth year, according to Genesis 27:25. "I'm no pagan who proselytes to Judaism and in adulthood is circumcised. I am a legitimate Jew by birth, circumcised the eighth day, faithful to the cardinal ritual at birth, a true-blooded Jew, nursed in the ceremonies of my ancestral religion. I followed that basic requirement. My parents had me circumcised."

So he's saying, "I was born into Jewishness. I was born into the Jewish faith. I followed the rituals from the very beginning. I started with the most essential rite and sacrament which they felt was absolutely necessary for salvation. So," he said, "I look at that circumcision that you see as so vital to salvation, and I'm telling you it's rubbish, it's rubbish. Because salvation is not by ritual, it is not by rite, it is not by ceremony, it is not by symbol, it is not by sacraments, it is not by masses, it is not by routines and rituals and washings and baptisms."

I don't care whether you're talking about Jewish symbols and Jewish sacraments and Jewish ordinances and rituals and ceremonies, or whether you're talking about Roman Catholic ones - Roman Catholic rites and rituals - or whether you're talking about Protestant baptism or Protestant sacraments or the Lord's Table or some other ritual, or whether you're talking about lighting candles or praying through beads or praying certain formula prayers - ceremonies, rites, and rituals don't bring salvation. That's what he's saying. "So I considered that truest Jewish rite of all rites, circumcision, as manure. As far as salvation is concerned, it's useless. It's waste. It's garbage. Throw it out. It can't help."

Secondly, he says salvation is not by race either. "If anybody had a right to boast I might, because not only was I circumcised the eighth day, but I am of the nation of Israel." The implication here is that some of the Judaizers probably were Gentiles converted later. They were circumcised later in life, and they weren't really of the nation Israel. They were proselytes. But Paul is saying, "I'm of the people of Israel." And you know as well as I do that the Old Testament is filled with the teaching that the children of Israel were the covenant people. They were God's chosen people. It was on them that He set His love. According to Romans chapter 9, verses 3-5, they are greatly blessed. It says they are the "Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ." They had all the privileges. "Israel only have I known," Amos 3:2. They were God's chosen, beloved people. He loved them sovereignly. And so he says, "I'm an Israelite. I am of the nation of Israel."

Could all the Judaizers claim such religious heritage? Do they possess by race the rights of God's chosen people? Paul did. And Paul understood the meaning of that.

Let me help you with that. All true Jews came from Abraham through Isaac through Jacob, because Jacob wrestled with an angel in Genesis 32, and after that wrestling - you remember, his struggle with God - his name was changed to - What? - to Israel.

So that's where the children of Israel come from - Abraham through Isaac through Jacob, who was Israel. There are other people who can trace their heritage back to Abraham, because Abraham had another son by the name of Ishmael. He was an illegitimate son born of the handmaid Hagar. He fathered the Arab people. There are some people who can say, "I am a child of Abraham." But the Ishmaelites are not the children of Israel. They are the children of Abraham through Hagar. There are some people who can say, "I am through Abraham and Isaac because Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau." And Esau produced the Edomites, more Arabic people. And there are people who can say, "I am of Esau, so I come through Abraham and Isaac." But only those who come through Abraham, Isaac and *Jacob* are Israelites.

So Paul is saying, "I am *pure* in terms of my Jewish heritage, pure descent from God's chosen people." That's a credential. And I'll tell you right now, the Jews believed that if they were circumcised the eighth day and if they were of the pure line coming out of the loins of Jacob and coming through the twelve tribes that were the children of Jacob, they were therefore the chosen people of God who were the saved - the redeemed, the inheriters of eternal glory. Paul says, "The fact of the matter is, that's useless. That is absolutely useless."

No religious virtue is gained by birth. Understand that? There are people today who want to affirm household salvation. They twist the Philippian jailer's story that he was saved and his whole household, and they assume that when parents are saved that the children born of those parents are in covenant relationship to God. And that's why they engage in infant baptism, which is a form of covenant identity. Infant baptism is how you identify a child as having been born into covenant identity, household salvation by virtue of parents. Not so; not so. Your religious family grants you no standing with God. The fact that you were born into a Christian nation grants you no standing with God. The fact that you were born into a Christian family grants you no standing with God, no salvation. It's useless. It's garbage. It's "rubbish."

Thirdly, salvation is not by rank. Salvation is not by rank. He says in verse 5, "Circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin." Now this is a ranking tribe. Of all of the tribes, certainly the two most elite were Judah and Benjamin. We talk a lot about Judah because out of the line of Judah comes the Messiah, but we can't forget Benjamin. Benjamin was a very, very elite tribe. Let me tell you why. Benjamin, first of all, was the younger of two sons born to Rachel. And you will remember the story in Genesis chapter 30 that Rachel was Jacob's favorite wife. And that made Benjamin a favorite child. In fact, he was the last, and thus he was the baby of all, and the baby of the beloved wife - the tenderly, beloved Benjamin.

Benjamin, furthermore, according to Genesis 35:9-19, was the only one of the sons of Jacob born in the Promised Land. And thus he had a very unique identity and title to that land. Benjamin, furthermore, was given unique military priority. Read Judges 5, verse 14; Hosea 5:8; and you will find that apparently when the troops went to battle, Benjamin was the frontline. They must have been loyal, courageous, great soldiers. Furthermore, when they went to find a king, to what tribe did they go? Benjamin. And they found Saul, 1 Samuel chapter 9, who was out of the tribe of Benjamin. You remember when God divided up the land, the Promised Land, He gave certain sections of the land to the tribes. I don't know if you remember this, but the section He gave to Benjamin included the city of Jerusalem. So the holy city itself was in the territory of Benjamin. And thus Benjamin was a very, very noble tribe, for in their territory was the great, holy city of Jerusalem. Judges 1:21 points that out to us.

Furthermore, according to 1 Kings 12:21, you remember after Solomon the kingdom split because there was a revolution. And the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom were divided, and Benjamin stayed loyal to the Davidic dynasty and stayed with Judah in the south. And Benjamin and Judah formed the legitimate southern kingdom, the northern kingdom went off in rebellion and eventually was carried away into captivity in 722 B.C. So Benjamin was loyal to David at the time of the kingdom being split, Benjamin and Judah then forming the southern kingdom.

A very famous man came out of the tribe of Benjamin, the man that God used to spare the entire nation of Israel from being massacred. That man's name was Mordecai. And Mordecai was used by God in the story of Esther to preserve the people of Israel. Mordecai was of the tribe of Benjamin.

So it was a noble group for a number of reasons. It stood above the other tribes. Not perfect by any means, and I don't want to be misunderstood. Shimei, that fool who cursed David and threw rocks at him, was a Benjamite. Second Samuel, chapter 16 and 19, record that. He did repent later on. But Shimei was a Benjamite, certainly not someone you'd want to claim. And maybe the worst of the activities of the Benjamites is recorded in Judges 19 and 20 where they perpetrated a gang rape that ended up in a victim being chopped into little pieces and mailed around to all the tribes. A gross thing - it ended up actually 25,100 Benjamites were massacred. So not all of the history of Benjamin is worthy of copying, but they were a noble group. They were considered a ranking tribe.

What is also interesting is this: that by the time Paul wrote Philippians most of the Jews didn't know their tribe. Two reasons: the records were lost in the Babylonian captivity, and secondly, intermarriage had blurred the lines, the tribal lines. What Paul is saying is "I have never been involved, and my family has never been involved in intermarriage. We have stayed pure Benjamites." So he is really a blue-blood. He is a Jew in the purest, truest sense who even knows his *tribe*, which was not the case for all the Jews and perhaps the Judaizers in this case. None of them may have known their tribe, none of them been from the tribe of Benjamin perhaps as well.

So, what's he saying? "I come from a ranking tribe. I come from ranking people. I come from privileged class. That means nothing. That is not adequate to save me from sin. That is not adequate to make me right with God. That is worthless in that regard. The highest aristocracy in Israel couldn't make me a child of God." And that's obvious even for us today. No noble religious heritage can make you right with God. You can even be a priest. You can even be a religious person. You can be a religious leader. You can be a teacher in a religion. You can be in a religious family. You can be a PK or an MK. That's a preacher's kid or a missionary's kid. You can be born into a religious family, a ministry family. God is not impressed. Rank has nothing to do with salvation. And where you are in the social strata of religiosity is immaterial to God, immaterial. He's not impressed. Being right with God is not gained by ritual, ceremony, rite. It is not gained by race. It is not gained by rank.

Now all three of those are received by inheritance. Paul got all those. He really couldn't earn them. His parents circumcised him. His parents determined that he was in the nation of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. So he says, "This I received by inheritance." But now, he says, "Here are four things I achieved by effort." So he adds to his inherited profit his achieved profit, and then says, "I consider this rubbish, too."

Number four, the last four he achieved. Number four: salvation is not by tradition, salvation is not by

tradition. He says, "a Hebrew of Hebrews." Now there might be several ways to understand what he means by that. I prefer to think, along with a number of commentators, that what he is saying here is, "I am a Hebrew child of Hebrew parents." In other words, "I've maintained my tradition. I have maintained my tradition." This is directed, by the way, at the dispersed Jews who had been scattered all around, including perhaps these in Philippi. And having been scattered around, they were greatly impacted by Greek culture. Many of them lost the Hebrew language. And when they lost the language, they lost the culture - they lost their tradition. You have a lot of Jews today who are trying to get their tradition back, but they'll never really get it back without the language. But they in those days had the same problem. They had become Hellenized, from the Greek word *hellen*, which means "Gentile." They had become victims of Greek culture, so they lost their language. They lost their tradition. He is saying, "Not me. I had Hebrew parents. I'm a Hebrew child. I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews. I maintained my tradition."

He was raised in a pagan city. He was raised in Greek culture in Tarsus, in Cilicia, which is near Galatia on the northeastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, not in the land of Israel. He was raised in Gentile territory, under Greek culture and Roman rule. But he says - you know his testimony - "I was faithful and personally committed to the tradition of Judaism and the language of my parents." You remember, according to Acts 22:3, he left his country and he went to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel, who was the chief teacher among the Jews. According to Acts 21:40, he could speak Hebrew fluently. He was a Jew. He was a Hebrew son of Hebrew parents. He followed the language. He followed the traditions. He followed the customs. He never deviated. According to Acts 26 - listen to this in verses 4-5 - he says, "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 previously, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion." He was an unwavering Hebrew. And everybody knows it, he says. All the Jews know it. He was a well-known young man because he had eminent gifts. He was known widely even as a young Jew. And everyone knew his devotion to tradition.

You know what God said? "I'm not impressed. I'm not impressed. No manner of loyalty to your traditional religion can save you. No amount of loyalty to your ancestral worship can save you. This is worthless. This is rubbish, manure, garbage - get rid of it. There's no treasure there. There's no pearl there." Just because you're loyal to your parents' Catholicism or your parents' Judaism or your traditional Protestant background, you're a Lutheran because your parents are Lutheran. Or you're a Presbyterian because your family has always been that way. Or you're Baptist because everybody's been Baptists, that kind of loyalty to a tradition is worthless as far as a means of salvation. It's worthless. Salvation doesn't come in those terms.

Number five: salvation is not by religion. Not only not by tradition, but by religion - but on a religious level Paul had really achieved. Look at verse 5, "as to the Law, a Pharisee." I just read out of 26:5 of Acts, where he said he lived his life according to the Pharisaic law, and here he says the same thing. He says, "When it comes to the Law, I was a Pharisee." In other words, "When it comes to my view of God's Word, I took the Pharisaic perspective." What does that mean? That is the highest level of religious achievement in Judaism. You can't get any higher than being a Pharisee. The Pharisee was the religious, radical fundamentalist. That was the Pharisee, the narrow-minded, legalistic, literalist fundamentalist who interpreted the Word of God specifically, directly to life.

You know where they came from? They came out of the intertestamental period between the end of the Old and the beginning of the New. There was 400 years in there when there was no writing going

on. And during that time the Jews began to drift into liberalism. They began to question the authority of Scripture. They began to compromise, and at that time came this group called Pharisees, which comes to mean separatists. And they were affirming that there must be an adherence to Scripture, that there must be an adherence to the Word of God, that there could be no deviation. So they felt they had to guard the Scripture. They had to study the Scripture. They had to interpret the Scripture. They had to proclaim the Scripture. They had to apply the Scripture. They had to castigate people who didn't apply it - that was the Pharisees. They started out with a noble cause; they started out as noble men. Obviously, over a period of time, they degenerated, and the point of their degeneration was when they came to believe that their strict adherence to the law was what saved them. That was the fatal flaw.

They were a very elite group. During the time of Christ the best estimate is that there were no more than 6,000 of them - that's all. No more than 6,000, because it was such a strict, demanding, circumscribed, legalistic lifestyle that very few people desired to live according to that standard. Paul says, "My view of the law, a Pharisee. That means I know the law. I can interpret the law. I have guarded the law, and I have lived by its strictest interpretation."

Not all of the Pharisees were snakes and vipers and fools and hypocrites and blind leaders and robbers, and envious, jealous, proud fakers. Some of them were serious-minded. They were trying their best to achieve status with God through religion. So this little, small group of elite people included in their number Paul. And not only Paul but, apparently, he says, "Not only was I a Pharisee, but I come from a line of Pharisees." We don't know whether he's talking about other Pharisees in the line of Pharisees, or the fact that his father may have been a Pharisee as well. But you read it in Acts 22:3, Acts 23:6, Acts 26:5, Galatians 1:14 - he often refers to his Pharisaic background. So he said, "I took religion to the highest level" - very religious.

Do you ever look around the world and see people like this? Very religious - up to their *ears* in religion; you see them all over the world. I've seen them all over the world, wearing robes and doing all of their religious activities, many of them functioning as priests, sacrificing, taking on themselves unbearable burdens, living in poverty and loneliness. Many of them in pain and deprivation, functioning to fulfill a religious pattern that they believe will please God. The bottom line, He's not impressed. He's not impressed with any of it, whether it's Judaistic religion, whether it's Buddhist religion, whether it's Islam, whether it's Roman Catholicism, whether it's Protestantism - the religious form does not impress God. And religious devotion can't save you. Paul says, "I considered my Pharisaic devotion to the law of God as rubbish, rubbish."

Number six: salvation is not by sincerity, salvation is not by sincerity. In verse 6 he says, "As to zeal" - boy, if anybody should have confidence I should, because - "as to zeal, I was a persecutor of the church." "I was a persecutor of the church." How zealous were you, Paul? "So zealous I killed Christians." That's pretty zealous. That's pretty zealous. By the way, to the Jew "zeal," *zēlos*, "zeal" was - mark it - the single highest virtue of religion. Did you get that? What is "zeal"? It's two sides of a coin, okay? "Zeal" is the coin. One side is love; the other side is hate. What do I mean? "Zeal" says, "I love God so much I hate whatever offends Him." That's "zeal." "I love God so much I hate whatever offends Him." Paul loved God, he loved the law of God, he loved the community of God - that's the Jewish people - he loved all that God had revealed to such a degree that he hated anything he thought offended God, and he thought Christians offended God. Why did he kill Christians? Because of "zeal." He loved Judaism so much that he hated anything that threatened it, and Christianity threatened it. So he persecuted Christians. To what degree? Read the book of Acts. He breathed out

threatening and slaughter on them. He created havoc in the church. He killed Christians. He pursued them. He chased them. He wanted to take their life. Hey, he's one up on the Judaizers. All the Judaizers did was proselyte. He persecuted. You think you've got zeal? I've got more. I went after them to kill them.

In fact, he says, "I am the *least* of the apostles," 1 Corinthians 15:9, "I am the *least* of all apostles." Why? "Because I persecuted the church. I'm not even worthy to be *named* as an apostle. I persecuted the church." Why did you do it, Paul? "Zeal for God. I loved Judaism so much I hated Christianity because it threatened it." That's zeal. You know what? He was sincere, wasn't he? I hear people say, "Well, it doesn't really matter what religion you are, as long as you're sincere." It's like saying, "It doesn't matter what poison you drink as long as you're sincere. You'll be all right." Mental attitude has nothing to do with it. It's a matter of truth. Paul was sincere. He was zealous for God. He was so zealous for Judaism that there was nothing he wouldn't do, and relentlessly, unsparingly, untiringly, and mercilessly he tried to stamp out Christianity because of his zeal for God - very sincere.

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 is not by ritual. Salvation is not by race. Salvation is not by rank. Salvation is not by maintaining tradition. Salvation does not come through religion, and 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."

Lastly, salvation is not by law-righteousness, salvation is not by law-righteousness. Or you could say righteous works. Verse 6, "as to the righteousness which is in the Law" - What was my approach? - "I was found blameless." What does that mean? "Found" has the idea of those who watched his life couldn't find anything to hold against him as a transgression. Outwardly the man lived according to the law.

Now he's not saying, "I was sinless." He's not advocating sinless perfection. He's not saying, "Before I was saved I was sinlessly perfect," otherwise he wouldn't have needed to be saved. And by the way, read Romans 7:5-11, when he's giving his pre-conversion definition of himself. He says, "I was fighting sin on the inside, and when I came across the law of God, sin was in me revived, and I died. Boy, I was in a battle with sin." He's never denying sin in him. That would be denial of Jewish theology. That would be a denial of his personal testimony in Romans 7:5-11 where he says as an unbeliever he was battling sin that was in him. But what he is saying is this: "That in general, with regard to the righteousness which is advocated by God's law, or the standard of righteous living advocated by the law of God, no one could find me blameable. I lived a blameless life. By human judgment I was a model Jew and lived by God's law."

Boy, this is some testimony. Listen, if you could be saved by works, he would have been saved, right? What a list. This guy's got the profit column filled. And he says, "Look, I was fine. I had filled up my profit column with all the things that earned my salvation, until I met Christ. And I found out that the righteousness of my own wasn't adequate, but there was a righteousness in Christ by grace, given to me by faith received, and that was the pearl of great price, and that was the true treasure,

and so I counted all this other stuff as manure, and I came to Christ." Verse 7, "whatever things were gain to me," all the stuff of verses 5-6, "those things I have counted as loss." They aren't a plus. They aren't a positive. They are a negative. Why? They damn you. They send you to hell under deception, under an illusion. And so, "I saw them for what they were. They were *detractors*. They were loss not gain for the sake of Christ." And "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 in order that I might gain Christ." That's it.

Can I give you a final contrast? Two men, two men came to the same crossroads. Paul was one. The other that I would like you to think about is a rich young ruler in Matthew 19. Jesus came to a rich young ruler, and He said to him, "You must obey the law." He said, "Which part of the law?" Jesus gave him some commandments. He said, "All those things have I kept." In other words, "I've been blameless. As to the righteousness which is in the law, I've been found blameless." Here was a man who had his profit column all filled up. He too was likely a Jew. He too perhaps faithful to the tradition. Certainly he was a young ruler, which means he was probably a ruler in the synagogue, which means that he was a very honored, ranking, traditional, faithful Jew, or he wouldn't have ascended to that level. He was extremely religious, and he was very sincere or he never would have come to Jesus and asked how to get eternal life. So you had a sincere, religious, traditional, loyal Jew called the rich young ruler in Matthew 19. And he comes to Jesus, and Jesus asks him about his life, and he says, "I've always kept the law" - just like Paul. And then Jesus shows him a better way. He says, "Give up everything you have and follow Me." And the young man said no, walked away.

Paul said just the opposite. Paul said, "I've got all these credentials. Man, I've got race, rank, ritual. I've got tradition, religion, sincerity, works-righteousness. I've got my profit column filled up." Jesus said, "Drop it all and follow Me." Paul said yes. And he counted it all but loss to gain Christ. The rich young ruler counted it all gain and forsook Christ. Every person in the world is in one of those two categories. When you meet Christ you either drop all the stuff that you've been counting on for your salvation and take Christ alone, or you hold to all the stuff you've been holding on to for your salvation and turn your back on Christ. Those two categories - you're in one of them. Everyone is. That's it.

So, whose child are you? The child of Paul? Or the child of the rich young ruler? What are you counting on? Who are you counting on for your salvation? You're either trusting yourself and your achievements, or Christ. And when you come to trust Christ, all the achievements become rubbish. That's the exchange.

Father, we thank You, this morning, for Your Word - such a clear-cut text, such a great testimony from this marvelous man as You moved in his life. Father, thank You that You have given us the same opportunity. You have shown us again this morning the rubbish that most people count valuable, and they are accumulating manure, waste that will buy them nothing when they could drop it all and turn to Christ and receive everything.

Father, I pray for the salvation of many who will sell all they have to buy the pearl, the treasure - salvation in Christ by grace through faith in His perfect work on the cross. Thank You for the gift of salvation which we can receive as You offer it to us. To that end we pray that many may receive it this day, that it might be to Your glory in Jesus' name. Amen.

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