

Judaism Counted For Nothing in Righteousness

Philippians 3:4-9

Philippians 3:4-9: *“...though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: **5** circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; **6** concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. **7** But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. **8** Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith”*

Background Notes

The church at Philippi was founded in the early 50s AD - see Acts 16. About ten years had gone by, and the church had grown in numbers and maturity. Paul was now under house arrest in Rome - see the end of Acts 28.

While Paul was a prisoner and awaiting trial, he wrote four books of the New Testament that are known as the Prison Epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul thanked them for a gift they had sent him (see chapter 4). In addition, he urged them to settle a division that was emerging in the church. That was the emphasis in the first two chapters of the epistle, and again in chapter 4.

Paul took up a different subject of concern in chapter 3 – the problem of the Judaizers. Judaizers were false teachers of the day who distorted the simple gospel of Jesus Christ. The non-Christian Judaizers said that you could not be saved apart from the Law of Moses. But there were also some Christians who were heavily influenced by Judaism, and the Christian Judaizers taught that you were saved by Christ, but you couldn't be sanctified or become spiritual apart from keeping the Old Testament Law and the Jewish traditions.

In chapter 3, Paul denounced the teachings of the Judaizers. In Philippians 3:4-9 Paul showed that he knew what he was talking about, because he was once a Judaizer himself. In fact, he far surpassed any of these false teachers in his knowledge, his experience, and his accomplishments in Judaism! Compared with Paul's past Judaizing activities, the false teachers were involved in “child's play.”

Paul was not boasting in these verses. He was showing from personal experience the futility of Judaism, when compared to God's good news of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Doctrinal Points

1. A person can have a relationship with Christ on the basis of faith alone.

In verse 8, Paul said, *“I also count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”* “The knowledge of Christ” and “gaining Christ,” do not mean just knowing facts *about* Christ but rather really *knowing* Him – that is, having a *personal relationship* with Him, and knowing Him as personal Savior and Lord.

Do you know Jesus Christ in that way? Do you have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? It is possible. We enter this relationship on the basis of faith alone (v9) - and on the basis of *nothing other than faith alone* (v4-6).

Paul itemized the religious attainments he had going for him before he met and accepted Jesus Christ as Lord, and he concluded that all those religious credentials counted for *nothing!* All the religious credentials he had by birth and anything he had accomplished by human efforts counted for *nothing* in reference to salvation and knowing God.

This is still true today. Religious ceremony or a religious connection, religious party or religious record, or even your religious righteousness – all these count for nothing in reference to salvation and knowing the Lord.

Did you catch all those religious items that don't count? Let's take them up one by one.

a. A relationship with Christ does not come through a religious ceremony.

Paul was circumcised the eighth day (v5). In strict conformance to the Old Testament Law, as a baby Paul underwent the ritualistic ceremony of receiving the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant. But, Paul said, that meant nothing as far as salvation goes.

Are you possibly trusting in your infant baptism for salvation? That ceremony means nothing as far as gaining a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. A relationship with Christ does not come through a religious ceremony.

b. A relationship with Christ does not come through religious connections.

Paul was of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews (v5). He was not a convert to Judaism or a proselyte - he was a Jew by birth. He was from the prestigious tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was the tribe that traced back to Jacob's favorite wife; the tribe that gave Israel her first king, King Saul; the tribe that remained faithful to the house of David when the kingdom split; the tribe that returned with Judah after the captivity; the tribe in whose tribal area the holy Temple was located. Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was not a Hellenistic Jew - he spoke Hebrew, and was brought up in the Jewish culture. He was not part Jewish; he was “true blue Jew” all the way through. But in reference to gaining salvation, Paul said that these religious connections counted for *nothing*.

Do you think that you're a Christian because you were born into a Christian family, or have some other religious connections? Your religious connections have nothing to do with saving you. A relationship with Christ does not come through religious connections.

c. A relationship with Christ does not come through a religious party.

Concerning the Law, Paul was a Pharisee (v5). You couldn't get any higher than that in Judaism in Paul's day. The Pharisees were the ultra-Orthodox Jews who advocated keeping all of the Law and all of the traditions. But Paul said that being part of this Orthodox religious party counted for *nothing* in reference to knowing Christ.

Do you think that being a Baptist or Presbyterian or Catholic (or any other religious party or denomination) will automatically get you into Heaven? No way! A relationship with Christ does not come through a religious party.

d. A relationship with Christ does not come through a religious record.

Concerning zeal, Paul persecuted Christians (v6). In Galatians 1:14, Paul said, "*And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.*" Paul did not just talk a good religious line - he vigorously put his faith into practice! But it was the wrong faith, and thus his religious works counted for nothing as far as salvation goes.

Apart from Christ, your religious works and your religious record are worthless. A relationship with Christ does not come through attaining a religious record.

e. A relationship with Christ does not come through religious righteousness.

Concerning the righteousness that is in the Law, Paul was blameless (v6). Notice he did ***not say "sinless,"*** but "***blameless.***" He carefully observed the Law and the legalistic requirements of Judaism's traditions. As far as his legalistic outward righteousness was concerned, Paul was flawless. He was not a hypocrite, like so many of the Pharisees. In fact, in Romans 7:7 Paul said that if it had not been for the commandment against coveting, he would have kept all of the Ten Commandments! Could any of us make such a claim?

But, Paul said, the religious righteousness that he had attained counted for *nothing* in attaining salvation. Paul counted all his "religious righteousness" as loss now that he had met the Lord, and found that salvation is on the basis of faith alone. In fact he said all his religious righteousness was like "*rubbish*" in comparison with knowing Christ.

Imagine a ledger with two columns: a "loss" column and a "gains" column. Before we became true Christians, we would have entered all our religious attainments in the "gains" column – just as Paul did. But when we met the Lord and He became our personal Savior through faith alone, all of these religious items that we had put in the "gains" column went over to the "loss" column - and only item now in the "gains" column was: ***knowing Jesus Christ!*** And we gain Christ through faith alone. A person can have a relationship with Christ on the basis of faith alone.

2. A person can have the righteousness of Christ on the basis of faith alone.

Verse 9: “*And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.*” When you become a Christian, you received forgiveness of sins and a relationship with Christ, but now you also have the righteousness of Christ imputed to you. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “*Christ was made sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*”

When He died on the cross, Jesus Christ took our place. He was judged for our sins so that we could have the same righteous standing before God as He has! God sees the believer clothed with the righteousness of Christ. A believer can have the righteousness of Christ on the basis of faith alone.

Practical Applications

1. For the non-Christian, there is only one item needed on your personal resume.

When you're looking for a job, you send out your resume to prospective employers. You load up your resume with all your educational credentials and all the training and experience you've ever had, in order to impress your potential employer.

What about applying for an entrance visa to Heaven? There's **only one item needed** on your personal “entrance to Heaven” resume – accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Knowing Jesus Christ is the one required item on your personal resume.

2. For the Christian, there should be only one item on your personal ledger.

What about that ledger with the “losses” and “gains” columns? In verse 7 Paul said that he counted (*past tense*) everything as loss compared to the gain of knowing Jesus Christ. In verse 8 he said he counts (*present tense*) everything as loss compared to the gain of knowing Christ. About thirty years had gone by since his Damascus road experience, and Paul was still counting everything else as loss in comparison with knowing Christ.

In fact, Paul said he had suffered the loss of *all* things, that he might gain Christ (v8). He suffered the loss of a prestigious position and career, and he also suffered the loss of his family and friends, who would no doubt have disowned him.

What about us? When we became Christians, there was only one item in the “gains” column – Christ. Is it still that way, or have other things crept back into the “gains” column – success, money, religious good works? Jesus Christ should be the only item on your personal ledger.