

## “ASSESSING PROFITS AND LOSSES”

### I. Introduction

- A. Imagine what would happen if, unbeknownst to you, every time you made a deposit into your bank account, the transaction was recorded by the bank as a withdrawal.
  - 1. Your financial situation would be the opposite of what you thought it was.
  - 2. Every transaction that you thought was profiting you would actually be making you poorer.
- B. This illustrates the point Paul is making in these verses.
  - 1. The things in which the unregenerate place their confidence with respect to their standing before God are actually counted as losses in the sight of God.
  - 2. If we think that anything that we do is sufficient to merit God’s favor, then we have not understood the nature of our predicament as sinners before a just and holy God.
  - 3. We have no righteousness of our own.
  - 4. We stand in need of an alien righteousness, a righteousness that comes entirely from outside of us, in order to be accepted by God.

### II. Earthly Gain Is Rubbish

- A. Our text begins with Paul assessing the things in which he used to place his confidence, his credentials as a devout Jew and strict Pharisee.
  - 1. Paul assesses these things by using accounting terminology, the language of loss and gain.

2. He has come to see that the things that he used to think belonged to the “gain” column in his ledger with God actually belonged to the “loss” column.
  3. The things that he used to think were in his favor actually counted against him.
  4. Instead of having a surplus of merit before God, Paul found that he was buried in debt.
  5. These things in which Paul used to place his confidence were hindrances to coming to Christ, because they gave Paul the false comfort of thinking that he had a righteousness of his own.
- B. Paul continues by saying that he not only counts these things as loss, but as rubbish.
1. The Greek term that Paul uses here can also be translated as “dung.”
  2. Paul used to see these things as his basis for making a claim upon God.
  3. But now he realizes that they are not only utterly worthless, but repulsive in God’s sight.
  4. Trash and excrement — such is the value that the Bible assigns to anything that we produce that we think places God in our debt.
- C. There are all sorts of things that we can be tempted to place our confidence in.
1. It might be your self-discipline, your reputation, your education, your career, your parenting, your witness, your support of the church’s ministry, your help that you extend to others, your avoidance of certain kinds of sins — and the list could go on and on.

2. While these are all good things, they need to be counted as rubbish when it comes to how they affect your standing with God.
3. Don't let your confidence before God rest upon anything that you have done.
4. Place your confidence in Christ alone.
5. When a ship is in danger of shipwreck, the crew will throw everything overboard in order to lighten the load in hopes of saving their lives.
6. This should be your attitude towards anything you are or do as far as how it affects your standing with God.
7. Like Paul, you need to suffer the loss of all things in order to gain Christ.

### III. The Righteousness That Comes by Faith Is of Supreme Worth

- A. In the next part of our text, Paul turns his focus to the righteousness that comes by faith.
  1. He talks about *knowing* Christ, *gaining* Christ, and *being found* in Christ.
  2. This language describes both the union and the communion that a Christian enjoys with Jesus Christ.
  3. Union with Christ refers to what happens at the time of our effectual calling, when we receive the benefits of Christ's redemptive work by being united to him.
  4. If you are a Christian, your union with Christ is an unalterable fact.
  5. Nothing will ever be able to separate you from Christ.

6. You already know him.
  7. You have already gained him.
  8. You are already found in him.
- B. Communion with Christ refers to the ongoing fellowship that we have with Christ once we are Christians.
1. Your communion with Christ is something that can and should deepen and grow.
  2. Kevin DeYoung explains this by using the analogy of marriage, saying, “you can’t be more or less married (union) but you can have a stronger or weaker marriage (communion).” [*The Hole in Our Holiness*, 124]
  3. Just as there are couples who have bad marriages, there are Christians whose fellowship with Christ is weak.
  4. Don’t let that be the case for you!
  5. There is nothing in your life that is more important than knowing Christ.
  6. This is why Paul speaks of “the *surpassing worth* of knowing Christ.”
  7. Treat your relationship with Christ as something that is of surpassing worth.
  8. Listen to these challenging words from John Flavel: “How little do we know of Christ, in comparison with what we might have known! O, how much time is spent in other studies and worldly employments [and entertainments]; but how little in the search and study of Jesus Christ! O then, separate, devote, and wholly give yourself, your time, and your strength to this most sweet,

transcendent study.”

- C. In verse 9, Paul sets a contrast between two different kinds of righteousness.
1. First, he speaks of “a righteousness of my own that comes from the law.”
  2. Because this kind of righteousness is produced by man, it is actually a pseudo-righteousness.
  3. From God’s point of view, it is no righteousness at all.
  4. It corresponds to the man in Jesus’s parable of the wedding feast who was cast out by the king because he wore his own attire instead of a wedding garment. (see Mt. 22:11-14)
  5. God’s law requires perfect performance on our part, which is why there is no true righteousness through the law.
  6. As James reminds us, “whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.” (Jas. 2:10)
  7. The problem is not with the law, but with us.
  8. The law is good, but it does not provide us with the strength to do what it requires.
  9. As Paul says in Galatians, “For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.” (Gal. 3:21)
- D. Even as Christians, it can be easy for us to go about our lives as if righteousness really did come from the law.
1. One book puts it this way: “for example, if a Christian is grieved by the fact that he struggles with anger and impatience towards others, he might resolve to try harder at being kind and

tenderhearted towards his neighbor, as God commands. In other words, in order to be more righteous, he focuses on the command rather than on Christ, who supplies us with his Spirit in order to obey his commands. The problem with this approach is that it assumes righteousness comes by law rather than the Spirit, which is really no different from the unbeliever's approach." [Brown and Keele, *Sacred Bond*, 146-7]

2. The reason why there is no righteousness through the law is because the law is powerless to change our hearts.
  3. For that, we need the gospel.
- E. This brings us to the second kind of righteousness mentioned in verse 9.
1. Set in contrast to the righteousness of our own that comes from the law is the righteousness "which comes through faith in Christ."
  2. This righteousness does not come from our performance but from God.
  3. It does not depend on anything within us but on faith.
  4. And faith is not a work on our part.
  5. It is merely the instrument by which the righteousness from God is received.
  6. Having faith in Christ amounts to putting all your trust in Christ, just as you put all your weight on a chair whenever you sit down in one.
- F. Paul describes this righteousness as "the righteousness from God."
1. The preposition "from" tells us that the gospel is the announcement of God's gracious provision of an alien righteousness, a righteousness that comes entirely from outside of us.

2. This is what makes the gospel good news.
  3. The only way we can be declared righteous by God is to have the perfect righteousness of Christ counted as ours.
  4. This is what Paul is talking about here.
  5. When we trust in Christ for our salvation, our sins are counted against Christ on the cross and his righteousness is counted as belonging to us.
- G. This does not mean that the law has no role in the Christian life.
1. Christians are set free from the law's curse in order that we might live for God, and the law tells us how to do that.
  2. While the law no longer condemns us, it still guides us in how God wants us to live.
  3. But as far as justification is concerned, faith and the law are diametrically opposed to each other.
  4. It is either the one or the other.
  5. You either have to put your faith in God to justify you, or you have to trust in your own works to justify you.
  6. You can't have it both ways.
  7. As Edward Fisher puts it, "Christ Jesus will either be a whole Saviour, or no Saviour; he will either save you alone, or not save you at all." [*The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 320]
  8. Or in John Calvin's words, "we are not received by Christ, except as naked and emptied of our own righteousness."

#### IV. The Hope of Resurrection Is Our Goal

- A. This brings us to the final part of our text, where the focus is upon the fact that the hope of resurrection is our goal.
1. In verses 10 and 11, Paul speaks of the two main aspects of Christ's redeeming work: his death and his resurrection.
  2. Paul says he wants to know Christ's resurrection power and share in Christ's sufferings.
  3. What is surprising is the order in which Paul mentions these things.
  4. First he speaks of resurrection, then he speaks of suffering.
  5. You would think that he would put them in the opposite order, speaking of suffering first and then resurrection.
  6. After all, that was the order in which Christ experienced these things.
  7. First he suffered, then he was raised.
- B. There is a good reason why Paul puts them in the order that he does here.
1. In verse 10, he is not thinking of the bodily resurrection of believers that will take place on the day of Christ's return.
  2. Instead, he is talking about how Christians experience the power of Christ's resurrection in this life.
  3. This is the power that brings about the new birth, gives us a new nature, and produces new life in us.
  4. This is why Paul prays for the Ephesians to know "what is the immeasurable greatness of [God's] power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead" (Eph. 1:19-20)



5. If you are a Christian, the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is at work in your life right now.
- C. Furthermore, it is Christ's resurrection power that will enable you to endure the suffering that always attends Christian faithfulness in this world.
1. Sharing in Christ's sufferings is part of your vocation as a Christian.
  2. You should not expect to live a worry-free life.
  3. Jesus does not promise his followers a life without pain or sadness or difficulty or disappointment.
  4. On the contrary, as Paul says in his letter to the Romans, we are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." (Rom. 8:17)
  5. Suffering preceded glory for Christ, and the same is true for you and me.
  6. God uses our suffering to conform us to the likeness of our suffering Savior.
  7. This is what Paul means when he speaks of "becoming like [Jesus] in his death."
  8. As we share Christ's sufferings, this unbelieving world is crucified to us, and we are crucified to it.
- D. In the last verse of our passage, Paul speaks of resurrection again, but this time in a different sense.
1. Here he has in mind the bodily resurrection from the dead that will take place at the end of this age.
  2. Paul says that he wants to attain to this resurrection "by any means possible."

3. In other words, whatever means God uses to get him there is okay with Paul.
  4. He does not know what those means will be.
  5. Perhaps he will die a martyr's death, or perhaps he will live to be an old man.
  6. Whatever path God ordained for him, Paul looked at his life with the ultimate goal in mind.
  7. He was focused upon that day when his perishable body will put on the imperishable.
- E. This should be your focus too.
1. Regardless of what happens to you in this life, keep your eyes fixed upon the hope you have in Christ.
  2. Trust that the Lord is in providential control over the events of your life.
  3. Trust that they are his appointed means to bring you to that day when you will be glorified with Christ.

## V. Conclusion

- A. People assign great worth to many things in this world.
- B. But nothing in this world is worth anything compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.
- C. And this thing that is infinitely more valuable than anything else in the world is something that you cannot obtain by your own efforts.
- D. You can only receive it as a gift of God's free grace.

E. This is what we remind ourselves of whenever we sing,

*Not the labors of my hands  
can fulfill thy law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and thou alone.*