

TRUE CHRISTIANITY: TO GAIN CHRIST

3³We are the [true] circumcision, we who offer worship by the Spirit of God and rejoice with confidence in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—⁴although I certainly have [reason for] confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks that he has [reason for] confidence in the flesh, I have more [reason]. ⁵[I was] circumcised on the eighth day, [I come] from the nation of Israel, [I am] of the tribe of Benjamin, [I am] a pure Hebrew, with regard to the law, [I was] a Pharisee. ⁶As far as zeal is concerned, I persecuted the church. With regard to the righteousness that [a man can attain] by the law, I had become blameless. ⁷However, whatever things were gain to me, these things I [now] regard as loss on account of Christ. ⁸But much more than that, I regard all things as loss on account of the all-surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, because of whom I have suffered the loss of all things. Indeed, I regard all such things as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, ⁹and be found in him—not having my own righteousness, which is derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that is from God [received] by faith—¹⁰so that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death, ¹¹that I may in some way attain the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:3-11)

Introduction

If you were in training to become a U.S. Secret Service agent, part of that training would include learning how to detect counterfeit money. How would that aspect of your training be conducted? How would you learn to detect counterfeit bills?

You would be given a course in which you would make a thorough study of genuine U.S. currency, not counterfeits. You would be made thoroughly familiar with the look, the feel, the smell, and the print of the real thing. By means of such training you would become able to immediately spot false currency because of its contrast to the real thing (*Our Daily Bread*, 11/25/95).

The Apostle Paul is using the same method of instruction here in Philippians chapter three. In order to safeguard the church from the heretical teaching that posed a potential threat to its spiritual life, Paul gives a thorough definition of true Christianity.

Notice that the apostle does not merely present a detached doctrinal dissertation on the subject of true Christianity. On the contrary, he presents and explains the truth by means of his own personal testimony. This by no means is to imply that true Christianity is nothing more than a personal subjective experience. But it does indicate that true Christianity requires far more than merely the intellectual acceptance of the truth, it requires the complete personal acquaintance and involvement of your very soul with the truth and with Christ Himself. As we consider the biblical teaching the Apostle Paul presents to us in Philippians 3:3-11,

let us also ask ourselves the question, "Is the apostle's testimony my personal testimony, too?"

To "*gain Christ*," this is how Paul defines true Christianity, and this is what he describes as being his greatest desire: to gain Christ. Is this likewise your greatest desire? As we consider this passage of Scripture, let us consider the questions, What does it mean to "*gain Christ*"? What is required if I am to "*gain Christ*"?

I. In Order to "Gain Christ,"

You Must Renounce All Trust in Your Own Personal Righteousness (vs. 4-7)

In Matthew 13:45-46 our Lord tells a parable about a man who is a buyer of fine pearls: "*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*" When the man comes across the most exquisite pearl in all the world he does not hesitate to sell his whole stock of pearls and with that money purchase this one outstanding pearl.

There is a striking parallel between that parable and the life and testimony of the Apostle Paul. In both cases we have a man whose present possessions cannot compare with the treasure he discovers. In a real sense, his present gains are a loss to him, for so long as he holds on to them he is prevented from acquiring the truly priceless treasure. Therefore, correctly assessing the situation, he is compelled to liquidate his present assets so that he may gain the all-surpassing treasure. Thus, the Apostle Paul writes: "*whatever things were gain to me, these things I now regard as loss on account of Christ*" (vs. 7.) What Paul willingly forfeited was his whole stock of accumulated personal righteousness, in order that he might gain the divine and perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verses 5-6 Paul lists his inventory of personal religious merit. He was "*circumcised on the eighth day.*" He had received the sacrament of circumcision, which marked him as a member of the covenant community, in complete accordance with the law of God: "*And Jehovah said to Moses, ²A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days ... ³On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised*" (Lev. 12:1-3.) He was "*from the nation of Israel.*" That is to say, he was a member of the house of Israel not only by circumcision, as were also the Gentile converts, but also by birth. He was "*of the tribe of Benjamin.*" By specifying the tribe from which he came, Paul is verifying the fact that he, indeed, is of the nation of Israel, coming from the same tribe as did the first king of Israel, his name sake, Saul. He was "*a pure Hebrew,*" (literally, "*a Hebrew of Hebrews.*") Both his parents, as well as his ancestors, were full-blooded Israelites, free of Gentile blood and wholeheartedly committed to religious purity untainted by any Greek pagan influence. "*With regard to the law,*" he was "*a Pharisee.*" Paul was a member of the strictest, most orthodox sect in all Judaism. According to the commentator, F.W. Beare, when Paul tells us that he was a Pharisee, he is claiming the highest degree of faithfulness and sincerity in

the fulfillment of his duty to God. *“As far as zeal is concerned,”* Paul *“persecuted the church.”* Paul vehemently strove against those whom he perceived to be the enemies of God and of Israel; he adamantly opposed all doctrinal and practical deviation from what he perceived to be the faith of his forefathers. *“With regard to the righteousness that [a man can attain] by the law,”* he *“had become blameless.”* Over the course of a lifetime of sincere religious devotion, Paul had brought his conduct into strict conformity with the law of God; he had become the most religious and moral person that was humanly possible.

After having listed this extensive inventory of personal righteousness and religious merit, the Apostle Paul goes on to write: *“However, whatever things were gain to me, these things I now regard as loss on account of Christ”* (vs. 7.)

In order to *“gain Christ,”* each of us must, like the Apostle Paul, renounce all confidence and trust in our own personal righteousness and religious merit.

II. In Order to “Gain Christ,” You Must Trust in Christ’s Divine Righteousness (vs. 8)

What caused Paul to have such a tremendous reversal of perspective? What caused him to take all that once was the object of his hope and trust before God, namely, his lifetime accumulation of personal righteousness, and now identify it as mere rubbish and stinking garbage, as he testifies in verse 8: *“I regard all things as loss ... Indeed, I regard all such things as rubbish.”*

He came to count all that he formerly considered to be gain as now being loss *“on account of [the Greek preposition, διό, with the accusative] the all-surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”* Here is a reference to the perfect knowledge of righteousness possessed by and exhibited by the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul had a personal encounter with Christ Jesus, the Holy One of God, beholding Him in the full splendor of His divine righteousness”

*About noon as I approached Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me? ⁸Who are you, Lord? I asked. I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting, he replied ... ¹⁰What shall I do, Lord? I asked. Get up, the Lord said, and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do. ¹¹My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. ¹²A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the Law and highly respected by the Jews living there. ¹³He stood beside me and said, Brother Saul, receive your sight! And at that very moment I was able to see him. ¹⁴Then he said, **The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth.** (Acts 22:6-8,10-14)*

In verse 9 Paul goes on to express his desire to *“be found in [Christ.]”* “To be found in Christ” is defined in verse 9 as having the righteousness that comes from God and is received by faith in Christ: *“found in him—not having my own righteousness, which [is derived] from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that is from God [received] by faith.”* “To be found in Christ” means accepting God’s invitation to trust in the perfect righteousness of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and have His righteousness spread over us as a garment of salvation in the sight of God, note Isaiah 61:10,

I rejoice greatly in Jehovah, my soul exults in my God; because he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness—like a bridegroom adorns his head with a turban like a priest and like a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isa. 61:10)

Consider the testimony of the Apostle Paul’s, made on the occasion when he found it necessary to rebuke Peter when the latter momentarily lapsed into legalism and by his conduct was denying the gospel: *“knowing that a man is not justified by his observance of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ—even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by our observance of the law, because no sinful man shall be justified by his observance of the law”* (Gal. 2:16.)

In order to *“gain Christ,”* each of us must, like the Apostle Paul, appreciate the all-surpassing greatness of the divine righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ and trust in His divine righteousness alone for your salvation. By way of illustration: You are practicing for the Olympic sprint race; in your own estimation you are doing very well, such is your confidence until you see the world recorder holder in action.

III. In Order to “Gain Christ,”

You Must Accept the Full Scope of Christ’s Salvation (vs. 9-11)

Exactly what it means to *“gain Christ”* is explained by the two following statements: 1) to *“be found in Him,”* (which has been defined in verse 9;) and 2) to *“know Him,”* (which is defined in verses 10-11.)

What does it mean, *“to know”* Christ? It means to be in a living union with Christ, to enter into His life and have His life in us, as the Lord Jesus declares: *“Remain in me, and I [will remain] in you. The branch cannot bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the vine; so neither can you [bear fruit], unless you remain in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him, he is the one who bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing”* (Jn. 15:4-5.)

“To know Christ” is more fully defined by the statements that follow: 1) that I may know him *“and the power of his resurrection.”* In other words, that we may experience operating in our own lives the same power that operated in Christ

when He was raised from the dead, namely, the power of God and His Holy Spirit. With regard to this matter, consider the apostle's prayer for the church: "*[I pray that you may know] the immeasurable greatness of his power available to us who believe; [that power is] in accord with the working of the might of his strength, ²⁰which worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavenly realms*" (Eph. 1:19-20.) Stated another way, "to know Christ" involves our participation in His resurrection life: "*We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we, too, may live a new life*" (Rom. 6:4.)

"To know Christ" also involves 2) a participation in "*the fellowship of his sufferings.*" As we share in the Savior's resurrection life we inevitably share in His sufferings, because participation in His resurrection life brings us into the life of God: "*The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God*" (Rom. 6:10.) This entails suffering because the life of God encounters the enmity of the world. Addressing the Hebrew Christians and comparing them with Christ, the writer to the Hebrews declares, "*Consider him who has endured such hostility from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood*" (Heb. 12:3-4.) Note: As is pointed out in Hebrews 2:18, part of the sufferings of the Savior that we also experience involves resisting temptation: "*Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*"

"The fellowship of [Christ's] sufferings" inevitably results in our "*becoming conformed unto his death.*" Christ's death is defined in Romans 6:10 (mentioned above) as a death to sin, (i.e., His death removed Him from the whole realm and influence of sin.) That same phenomenon, occurring as a process called sanctification, is progressively carried on in the Christian's life until our final departure from this world of sin and entrance into glory.

Paul sums up this sequence of events by expressing the Christians' ultimate, and sure, hope: "*that I may in some way attain the resurrection from the dead.*" He is referring here to the resurrection on the last day; note our Lord's testimony: "*Do not be amazed by this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice ²⁹and shall come out: they who have done good shall be resurrected to life; but they who have done evil shall be resurrected to condemnation*" (Jn. 5:28-29.) Paul's language ("*that I may in some way attain the resurrection*") is not intended to convey uncertainty, note the certainty already expressed in Philippians 1:6, "*Of this I am sure, [namely,] that he who began a good work in you will carry it out to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.*" His language is intended to convey a holy humility, the opposite of complacency and negligence; consider Philippians 2:12, "*my beloved ones, just as you have always obeyed, so now—not only in my presence, but much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*"

In order to "*gain Christ*," each of us must, like the Apostle Paul, accept the full scope of Christ's saving work and purpose. The construction of the passage (as it occurs in the Greek) indicates that "knowing Christ" is the whole purpose of redemption: "I suffered the loss of all things ... in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him ... so that I might know him." True Christianity is not only to have Christ represent you, but also to have Him possess you; not only to have Christ give His righteous life for you, but to have Christ bring you into His life and reproduce His righteous life in you.

Conclusion

When it comes to currency, the U.S. Secret Service agents are made thoroughly familiar with the real thing so that they may be able to readily detect all that is counterfeit. In the same way, the Apostle Paul seeks to safeguard the church from potentially destructive teaching by giving us a thorough definition of true Christianity.

In this great passage of Scripture true Christianity is defined as "gaining Christ," which in turn is defined as 1) being found in Christ—trusting Him to supply His perfect and divine righteousness for our salvation (both in the form of His active obedience in perfectly keeping the whole law of God and in His passive obedience in submitting to the will of God by shedding His blood on Calvary's cross to make atonement for our sins—and 2) knowing Christ—personally entering into the righteous life of Christ and having His life reproduced in us.

May God not only grant us to recognize what true Christianity is, may He also grant us to partake of it. May God grant each of us to "*gain Christ*."