11 Philippians 3:4–9 Gain…and loss

1. Introduction

a. There are many comparison sites on the internet that are useful because they compare different products. The strength of what these comparison sites do is to show you the pros and cons, the strengths and weaknesses of each product. This can be helpful in deciding if this product meets your needs and is right for you.

b. After WW1 US army General Pershing was looking for volunteers to take part in a victory parade in Paris. There were 2 requirements: a good record and they must be at least 186cm tall. Each soldier was measured against a mark on the wall – if they didn't make the mark they didn't qualify to take part.

c. One of the questions asked on a street interview was "How do you get to heaven?" The commonest response was they thought you got there by being a good person. The question is what do they mean by a good person? According to their way of thinking it means that they are better than others because they don't get drunk, they don't shout at their kids, they don't steal, they've never killed anyone, they live as good citizens. That's how people justify themselves and convince themselves that they're going to get to heaven. They compare themselves to others and come to the conclusion that they are in the top half that's going to make it.

Philippians 3:4-9 *…though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. [7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith…*

d. Paul spells out his credentials that some may think might qualify him to be acceptable to God. He has an impeccable record in terms of his adherence to the requirements of the Judaistic faith he was brought up in. He has a perfect record – when you look at Paul's resumé, if anyone qualified for God's approval he did.

e. Paul is responding to a group of people whose confidence came from a root of fleshly pride, who felt the need to add an external ritual derived from Judaism on top of the gospel of salvation. The bible says we are justified through faith in Jesus by the grace of God – a free gift that cannot be earned that was purchased on our behalf by the blood of Jesus on the cross.

2. Good enough?

a. How good does a person have to be to get to heaven? How do you measure goodness? On a scale of 1(bad)–10(good), where would you put yourself? And where would God put you? Where's the mark on the scale that qualifies you for heaven? Like the story of the WW1 soldiers, there has to be a mark against which we can measure ourselves that God also uses to measure us. The bible tells us what that mark is:

Romans 5:13 *…for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.*

b. Sin becomes defined through the law of God, which has been given so we know what sin is; now we have a scale to measure our goodness. Without the law, we didn't know what was right and what was wrong in God's eyes. But we did have our conscience, which is our moral compass to be our internal monitor. But conscience can so easily be overridden by the will. What the law did was to bring definition – we now know what God says is right.

Matthew 5:17 *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*

c. Jesus didn't come to abolish the law and the Prophets, he came to fulfil them. To fulfil something means that you complete it, you fill it full. And it's the law AND the prophets. Everything contained in the books of the law and the prophets in the Old Testament is completely fulfilled in and through Jesus. This is what he came to do. The law of God is very hard to keep because it continually challenges our flesh and our sin nature.

d. In the sermon on the mount Jesus says, "You have heard it said…" referring to Old Testament statements about the law. "You have heard it said you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." The deed is already done in our hearts, even if we don't commit the physical act! And He does this with several laws. If anyone is angry with his brother, he has committed murder in his heart! Statement after statement Jesus raises the bar. He's making the law harder – or even impossible – to obey, but easier to fulfil.

e. What's the difference? If you try to make yourself righteous on the basis of following all the laws of God … forget it, you are setting yourself up to fail. But if you want to know the point of the law — the reason behind it — that will cause you to press in and lean on Jesus all the more. It becomes a matter of the heart and not just of behaviour.

Galatians 3:24 *So then, the law was our tutor [schoolmaster] to bring us to Christ, in order that we might be justified by faith.*

f. Paul explains the practical outworking of what Jesus came to do – the law teaches us that we need Jesus. We can't keep it however hard we try. Just be thankful that you live this side of the cross where faith in Jesus opens the door to your redemption.

3. Keep your balance…

a. Paul argues that if ever there was a person who could be right with God on the basis of keeping the law, he could. He has the credentials by his birth, and he had the right track record by his experience. He gives seven reasons why this was so:

i Circumcised on the 8th day

ii From the people of Israel

iii Of the tribe of Benjamin

iv A Hebrew of Hebrews

v Lived according to the law as a Pharisee

vi A zealous persecutor of the church

vii Blameless under the law

b. If you were to compile a list of your credentials and qualifications that you thought would get you into heaven before you were saved, what would you put on it? What were the things you did that you felt were your strengths that made you a good person?

c. In our generation, being born in what used to be called a "Christian nation" counts for nothing. You may have been christened as a baby, but that doesn't guarantee your salvation. Some put their faith in church attendance and membership, or their faithful service. All these things count for nothing in God's eyes.

d. For Paul, everything changed on that Damascus road when Jesus met him, and he came to understand that all of those things he was counting on for right standing with God were worthless.

Isaiah 64:6 *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags…*

e. Sometimes the bible is very descriptive, but our Western, sanitised versions can obscure the true understanding of what's really being said. When you think of filthy rags, what comes to mind? The word is derived from a Hebrew word ***iddah*** and it refers to the bodily fluids from a woman's menstrual cycle. That's what Isaiah means by filthy rags. If we try to come to God with our own righteousness, in God's eyes that's what we're offering him.

f. In v4–6 of our passage, Paul has outlined all of his so-called assets, everything that should qualify him to be in good standing before God. In v7 he moves everything from the credit column into the debit column and counts it as loss. It's worthless, there is something worth infinitely much more to pursue and invest in. Paul ceased to trust in his Jewishness, his culture and even the framework of his belief. His encounter with Jesus convinced him that every "fleshly" thing in which he had put his confidence for salvation was worthless.

g. But Paul doesn't condemn the things in his past in themselves. There's nothing wrong with being born a Jew and being reared in a Jewish home and culture; there was nothing wrong with any of those things. The problem was not with the things in themselves, but rather with Paul's attitude to them and what he hoped they'd accomplish before God. What Paul thought God would find pleasing, were the same things that virtually made him an enemy of God.

h. Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road changed his way of thinking. He realised that the way to approach God and be acceptable to him was not through the pursuit of things or ideologies or birthright etc – but through the pursuit of a person – Jesus. This new perspective showed him that his background didn't give him a special standing with God. What changed was his attitude to those things that he had over-valued in his life – they had become stumbling-blocks to receiving the grace of God in his life.

i. Question: are there any stumbling-blocks to receiving the grace of God in your life? Anything that restricts or prevents you from receiving the grace of God is a stumbling-block. It may be unforgiveness, or shame, or something from their past that hasn't been dealt with, self-love or

self-hatred, or maybe a recurring sin that you can't get victory over. Paul's answer is to wholeheartedly pursue the one who can give us freedom from the power of these things over us.

4. Count everything as loss

Philippians 3:7–8 *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*

a. This is what Paul did. The Greek perfect tense here in v7 means a completed action with ongoing results. That means he made a one-off decision in the past that still holds true today.

b. In v8 Paul takes his argument a stage further. He says "I count <u>everything</u> as loss…" Now he extends it to include anything else that doesn't come under the category of "*the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*." For him, knowing Jesus is of far surpassing value to anything else that could even be imagined or done.

c. In Mark 9 we read the account of Jesus' transfiguration in the company of Elijah and Moses. Peter suggests they should build three shelters – we don't know his reasoning for this. But as soon as he said it they were enveloped by a cloud and a voice cried out "This is my Son, my beloved – listen to him."

d. The point is this: we can have our own ideas, our own thoughts, but everything must be submitted to and subjugated to the heart and mind and word of Jesus. God says listen to him and you will get things in the right perspective. Peter wasn't chastised or reprimanded – he was redirected.

e. In v8 Paul speaks of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus <u>*my Lord*</u>. He personalises that relationship, it's a deep, enriching, satisfying relationship with a living person. Knowing about Jesus doesn't carry a surpassing value. This is ***gnosis***, the knowledge gained by personal experience. Paul invokes the Lordship of Jesus – it's all-encompassing, he must have pre-eminence over everything in our lives. "He's Lord of all or not at all!"

f. Many Christians are content with just being saved from hell, but are missing the point. Paul says we have to have a radical shift in our priorities, promoting the pursuit of the knowledge of Jesus above all other demands on our lives. He goes on "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ." He lost his high standing as a Pharisee. He endured loss through imprisonment, beatings, shipwrecks, desertion by friends and continual rejection. He suffered real hardship and pain for the rest of his life because of his devotion to Jesus.

g. All of these personal losses were fine with Paul because compared to the gain that he had in Jesus, he considered them to be rubbish. Our Western bibles have sanitised the text to say "and count them as rubbish." To illustrate how strongly he felt Paul uses a much more potent word – the Greek word here is ***skubalon*** which literally means excrement or dung. That's how Paul regarded the loss of all things in comparison to gaining Christ.

5. Found in him…

Philippians 3:9 *…and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith…*

a. The pursuit of Jesus is not an optional extra after we are saved. Paul often speaks of us being "in Christ" – eg. Romans 8:1 "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." When we personally came to know Jesus, we were placed in Christ. God the Father views us as believers through the Son, he doesn't look on our filthy rags righteousness, but on the true and acceptable righteousness of Jesus.

b. Faith is an important element of our life in God, but many people are confused about the part it plays. Paul says: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God…"* [Ephesians 2:8]. You're not saved by faith – you're saved by grace through faith. The grace of God imparts this salvation to you as a free gift. Faith is the access-point, the doorway in. That's how faith operates in the life of a Christian – it's a door-opener to whatever's inside, whether that's salvation, healing, gifts of the Spirit etc. Faith isn't something we have to work up, it's the hand that takes what God freely offers. Salvation doesn't depend on your faith, but on Jesus' faithfulness.

c. Faith is not complicated. It's not like your bank account where you have to have enough of it before you get what's promised, and it's not a commodity to be traded for spiritual favours. You don't even need a whole lot of it, it's the tiny mustard seed that can move mountains. It's not how much faith you have, it's what you do with it and where you place it. I like this quote from Billy Graham:

   i *"You see, it isn't the size of our faith that's important, but the object of our faith. In other words, in what (or whom) do you place your faith? Is your faith simply in "faith" (as is true with some people)? Or is it in your feelings, which come and go? Is your faith in your good works, hoping somehow that you've been good enough for God to accept you? Or perhaps your faith is in God — but God sometimes seems distant and unconcerned about you. Only one person is worthy to be the object of our faith — and that is Jesus Christ. He alone is our Saviour, for He alone has opened heaven's door for us. Make certain that your faith is in the right place, by committing your life in complete faith and trust to Jesus Christ."*

d. Paul says that if we come to Jesus by faith we must continue to walk in the same way that we received Christ – that is through faith in the finished work of Jesus, and not on any merit of our own. He's looking forward and wants to be sure that when he dies or Jesus comes again, whichever comes sooner, that he will gain Jesus' acceptance and enjoy his fellowship forever.

6. Conclusion

a. Extract from Corey Russell's book "Pursuit of the Holy."

   "We need to be clear about what the knowledge of God is. The true knowledge of God does involve an intellectual agreement and a verbal agreement with who he is. But the knowledge of God goes way beyond that.

I would define the knowledge of God as the intimate, spiritual knowing and understanding of him. This knowing transcends the way we know our acquaintances or friends. It involves a deep and intimate knowledge of God. The word "know" in the old and new testaments carries with it the idea of a husband knowing a wife in a marriage relationship. This knowing is a deep sharing and interchange of words, thoughts, emotions and experiences; it surpasses a mere mental or verbal agreement.

In John 17:3 Jesus called the knowledge of God eternal life: "This is eternal life that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Jesus defines eternal life not quantitatively, but qualitatively. He defines it not primarily as something that appears after we die; it is a quality of experience that is found when we come into contact with the only true God in this life. This experiential knowledge of God encompasses salvation, but he's not limited to salvation. Nor is it limited to a one time encounter with him. It is, in fact, boundless. It involves an ever growing, ever increasing, intimate and living understanding of God. This is what the apostles prayed for and what is available to every believer: growing in the knowledge and revelation of God.

We were made to be stunned at the sights and sounds of heaven. God means for us to be awestruck by his ways and overwhelmed by who he is. This is not a hard-to-attain way of life, meant only for a select few. This is the portion of everyone who has been redeemed by royal blood. John 1:14 states, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory." We are meant to be amazed and captivated by his glory. We can't even image what he has in store for those who seek him out. As Paul said, quoting the prophet Isaiah, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him."

These are more than doctrinal truths that we are meant to agree with. They are marvellous, mysterious realities that should cause us to fall on our knees and worship God. God never intended for us to just get information clear in our minds – he intended for us to be fascinated by him for all of eternity. It's about being stunned over and over again. If our information about God is not accompanied by wonder, something is wrong. We must go and unlearn what we have been taught about God so we can learn the truth about him.

Let's be honest: what causes us to marvel? What fascinates us? What causes us to weep? Are we stunned at the beauty and knowledge of God and the revelation of Jesus Christ? Or are we fascinated by everything but God?"

Mark 8:36 *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*