



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Gospel Accounting in the Capitol

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-9

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In state government, budgeting and accounting are huge issues dealt with almost constantly. The state has “assets” and income as well as “liabilities” and spending. Candidates run campaigns based partly on their priorities for spending or cutting the budget. Parties base their platforms on their philosophy, values, and priorities related to spending. Today there is a lot of talk regarding cutting both state and federal spending with brings these issues to the forefront of everyone’s attention.

In our ongoing study of Philippians, we come now to a passage where Paul relates in a most personal way the testimony of his conversion to Christ and how it changed his life. Acts chapter nine records for us the events and circumstances of Paul’s salvation experience. Here in Philippians we find out what took place in Paul’s heart and mind. In describing this change he uses terms from the world of accounting, noting spiritual assets and liabilities, and what he truly valued in his life. We can call Paul’s testimony here “Gospel Accounting” as he encourages us to evaluate what is truly important in life:

⁷But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸More 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 so that I may gain Christ, ⁹and 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... Philippians 3:7-9

We quickly notice the accounting terminology Paul uses in this passage. He speaks of “gain” and “loss”. These are the terms of the profit and loss columns we might find on a ledger or spreadsheet. Three times he says he “counted” his old way of life over against his new life in Christ. This word means to carefully consider or reckon, as one might do in an audit of a financial statement. Paul uses these terms from the world of finance and

accounting to show how his values and priorities changed when he came to know Christ. Let us take a closer look at Paul’s “Gospel Accounting” as he strives to share with us what is truly valuable in life.

PROFIT AND LOSS

Consider carefully the three “counts” Paul makes in this passage. **“Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ” (vs. 7).**

The items which Paul at one time considered as great gain are listed in Philippians 3:5-6. The inherited list of ritual, race, and rank along with the chosen pursuits of tradition, religious activity, sincerity, and legalistic righteousness were all extremely important to him. While there may have been some measure of material gain in Paul’s former way of life, he is mainly referring to the spiritual gain he thought he got from these things. He was seeking to be right with God and thought he could do so through his own position, achievements, and efforts. Paul described his trust in these things as “**putting confidence in the flesh**” (vs. 3-4). He thought he could earn God’s favor by his position, the things he did, and the morals he kept. He valued these things greatly and believed God did too.

What he learned was that because of his sin, he stood guilty before God and under His wrath and judgment. Paul understood God’s requirement to be “**You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect**” (Matthew 4:48), and he knew how far short he fell from that standard (Romans 3:23). He realized no earthly position or any amount of good works could ever make up for that. Only Jesus, His perfect life, and His suffering and death on the cross for sin could provide the righteousness needed to make him right with God. That is why he was willing to count as loss all those other things 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.” (vs. 8). Paul goes on to emphasize even more strongly the change in his priorities. “**More that that...**” vividly emphasizes the contrast between religious efforts that do not impress God and the incomparable value of knowing Christ.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATOR / ELECTED OFFICIAL INTERIM BIBLE STUDY TUESDAY, JUNE 14

12:00 NOON – TREASURER’S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54 IN BASEMENT OF EAST WING)

Gospel Accounting in the Capitol (Philippians 3:7-9)

As we look at the ledger or spreadsheet of our lives, we need to ask ourselves what we truly value. The value of knowing Jesus surpasses that of anything else this world has to offer.

“I...count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ” (vs. 8). Paul emphasizes his point even further by using what many consider to be a slang term to describe how he sees his old way of life. “Rubbish” (here in the NASB) is translated “dung” in the KJV. It was at times used to refer to household waste or table scraps, certainly something that is worthless. However most feel Paul is not only referring to something worthless but something truly repulsive, hence a term most often used to refer to excrement or manure. What a contrast! Things that were valued so highly by Paul and so respected by those in his society, he now sees as worthless and repulsive compared to having a right relationship with Christ. The activities of which Paul wrote may not have been wrong and worthless in and of themselves. It is when they kept him from knowing and following Christ that Paul compared them to worthless garbage and filth.

TURNING THINGS UPSIDE DOWN

In this passage we see the great change that took place in Paul’s heart and mind. His values and priorities changed dramatically. He recounts how the things that used to be of great gain to he no longer considers to be of any value. As a matter of fact, he now counts them as loss, comparing them to rubbish or refuse. The **“but”** in verse seven points to this change. In verses 4-6 he lists the things he values so greatly and considers great gain. “But”, he now counts those same things as loss. What happened? Paul met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus (**Acts 9**) and came to understand that Jesus was indeed Who He had claimed to be – the Son of God Who came to die for the sins of the world. Paul repented of his sin, placed his faith in Christ, and his heart and life were dramatically changed. Only this can bring about the kind of transformation Paul describes in Philippians 3.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Whenever there is an audit or accounting of a budget or financial statement, you always reach the “bottom line” of the gains vs. the losses. As Paul draws his conclusions from his accounting of the gains and losses of his life, he directs our attention to the bottom line of what it is truly important and of eternal value. His conclusion: EVERYTHING is a loss for the sake of Christ and compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ. But for Paul,

the ultimate bottom line was knowing beyond any doubt he was right with God. This is what Paul refers to in verse 9:

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.

All those things which Paul used to count as gain were simply his attempts earn his own righteousness (be right with God) through his position and human effort. He now knew that true righteousness could only be found through faith in Christ and His work on the cross.

Do we still make the same accounting error as Paul did? We can determine so by simply answering the question, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” or “What do you have to do to get to heaven?” If we answer “by being good” or by keeping some list of standards, actions, or activities, then we have made a grave accounting error and things will never add up correctly in God’s sight.

Paul understood the “Great Exchange” that takes place in gospel accounting. When we repent and place our faith in Christ, God places all of our sin on Jesus’ account as He is punished in our place and on our behalf. The goodness, or righteousness, of Christ’s perfect life is then placed on our account. What a glorious transaction of God’s grace! No wonder Paul counted all earthly things as loss in view of knowing Christ.

CONCLUSION

What kind of accounting are you making as you consider the ledger of your own life? As we close, let us consider Jesus’ own pointed words on this same subject:

²⁴Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ²⁵“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? Matthew 16:24-26