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LOSS VS. GAIN

How are you at keeping score? Many people have a vague idea that God tracks their deeds. They're counting on the few good outweighing the many bad on Judgment Day. But in Philippians chapter 3, the Apostle Paul pretty much demolishes such erroneous wishful thinking.

Verse 7 spells it out. **"Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ."** Why this change of heart and mind? Before Paul came to know Christ as Lord and Savior, he was the consummate religious person. **"If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more."** No brag. Just fact.

The Apostle Paul was one of the most well-educated men of his day. Many scholars label him the premier thinker of the 1st century AD. No one rivaled him until St Augustine in the 5th century. But Paul was more than an intellectual giant. When it came to religion, His Jewish pedigree was impeccable.

He's writing to Philippi, a Roman colony which worshiped multiple gods and idols. They were devoted to a politically-correct plethora of deities, calculated to better their lot in life by pleasing people in authority, and appeasing appropriate gods or goddesses. They denied the one true creator God of the Bible.

Jews looked down on such uncircumcised "Gentile dogs." Paul's religious resume included a proud family heritage with Jewish ancestry and Roman citizenship, plus envious training as a top student of the top professor Gamaliel. As to personal righteousness, Paul had relished his persnickety devotion as a perfectionist Law-keeping Pharisee, and his unrivaled zeal as a persecutor of the sect of Jesus followers. To a 1st-century Jewish religious mind, Paul had it all.

But God was not impressed. Ironically, all the works-righteousness amassed by Paul only made him the **"chief of sinners"** (1 Tim 1:15). Amazingly, his sins had been paid for by the blood of Christ. When Paul met Him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9,22,26), the risen Lord opened his blind eyes. Paul abandoned all hope in fleshly religious fervor, and put his trust completely in Jesus Christ.

Verse 8 explains, **"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."** When it's all added up, God's heavenly accounting system surpasses fleshly works-righteousness. No one could be more "self-righteous" than Paul, but **"For Christ's sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ."**

Paul's personal testimony proclaims religious rituals a rubbish, because they cannot reconcile you to a perfectly holy God. That's why God sent His one and only Son, Jesus, to live a perfect life and die a perfect death -- to pay the penalty for sins. That's something you cannot do, only receive.

Verse 9 explains, **"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."** Self-righteousness is non-existent compared to the perfect righteousness of the holy Son of God. And in God's amazing grace, He offers to exchange your rubbish for Christ's righteousness. That's the good news of the Gospel, received by faith, not by works.

Re-do the math, Paul says. Everything you would humanly put in your "gain" column really goes in the "loss" column. The only real gain is something you cannot do, but only receive, as God's gift of grace. You'll never earn it, never deserve it, never be good enough to measure up to God's perfection. So God invites you to simply humble yourself at the foot of the cross, and receive His grace in Christ. Whether you've seen that before, you can receive it now. Simply renounce your own works-righteousness once and for all, and put your complete trust in the only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

His loss is your gain, as His gift to you as a repentant sinner. Receive His grace today!