

## "WHAT MUST I DO TO GAIN CHRIST?"

It is good to be confident, isn't it? But would you agree confidence is not good when it's misguided? It's devastating to place confidence in a medical treatment that proves to not only be ineffective but to have terrible side effects. What about the older person who with great confidence goes all in on an investment scheme only to discover it was a scam? There are few experiences we want to avoid more than finding out something in which we place great confidence proved false.

As bad as those experiences I mentioned might be, there is none more dramatic than that one Jesus pictures in **Matthew 7** at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Imagine the scene: You stand in the presence of God on the Day of Judgment. Destinies are at stake. You want into the Kingdom of Heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ comes to the front of the group with whom you are standing, and you start to say, "*Lord, Lord, have we not done many wonderful works in your name...*" But he does not smile. There is a look of incredible sadness on his face. He says, "*I never knew you, go....*" Slowly it sinks in that life is over. This is it. Were you too flippant or indifferent about your relationship with God? Or perhaps you *felt* confident, but your confidence was misplaced? This passage in **Philippians 3** offers us so much help. It tells us where to place our confidence when it comes to our relationship with God so that we will not be deceived or disappointed.

I have titled this message, "*What must I do to gain Christ?*" This is based on the words in **verses 8-9**, where Paul says there are certain things I have done *in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him*. So, let's ask the question and seek clarity on it and its implications: ***What must I do to gain Christ, to gain salvation and eternal life, and to be right with God?*** One way to develop the biblical answer to that question is to focus on two key phrases in this passage. The first one is found in **verse 3**; at the very end of the verse, it's the statement *put no confidence in the flesh*. It may seem funny to say the first thing

you must do is to *not* do something - "*don't do this,*" but that's how the passage reads.

## I. IN ORDER TO GAIN CHRIST YOU MUST PUT NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH.

In **Philippians 3:3**, Scripture describes those who have truly found and gained Christ as those who *put no confidence in the flesh*.

### A. When it comes to being right with God do not put any confidence in credentials or accomplishments or character.

After saying *put no confidence in the flesh*, in **verse 4** he adds: *though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more.* He wants us to see that he had an awesome resume that he came to reject as worthless!

He begins to list things.

**1<sup>st</sup> He participated in the rituals commanded by God.** Verse 5, he says he was "*circumcised on the eighth day.*"

**2<sup>nd</sup> He belonged to a race blessed by God.** of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin.

**3<sup>rd</sup> He practiced his religion zealously.** In **verses 5-6**, he says he was a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church. To say he was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" means he was all in, totally committed. The Pharisees were the strictest, most conservative, sold-out, and most aggressive religious party in Israel.

**4<sup>th</sup> He kept the rules blamelessly.** Verse 6; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

He isn't claiming to be sinless. In **Romans 3:10**, he wrote *there is none righteous, not even one.* In **Romans 3:23**, He insists *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* He's not contradicting the many places where he honestly admits his own sinful failures. What he's

doing is presenting his impressive credentials to demonstrate the fact that he lived with exemplary conformity to religion prescribed by the Old Testament Scriptures. He was moral and devout. The point is that if anyone doubted the exemplary quality of his life, they could check the record and would find he was a blameless man. So all of this makes it all the more impressive when he says that he, and we should put no confidence in any of these kinds of things. Notice the conclusion in **verses 7**. *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.* God tells us in **verse 3** to put no confidence in the flesh and in **verses 4-6** he gives us a vivid example in Paul to illustrate and emphasize this truth: *we should put no confidence in the flesh!* *This is important – it's necessary to see because...*

**B. Accepting the truth that we do not deserve and cannot earn God's grace is an essential preparation for receiving grace.**

In **Luke 18:9-14** Luke introduces a parable with the words Jesus told this parable to some who *trusted in themselves that they were righteous*. Jesus talked about two men who come into a place of worship. One of them does what Paul has just renounced. He's confidently telling God he's thankful his life is righteous. He's thankful he is right with God because of all the good things he does. The other man, said Jesus, beat his breast, and said *God be merciful to me, a Sinner!* Jesus concluded, *I tell you, this man went home to his house justified rather than the other.*

The message of Jesus in the Bible says that while we have great dignity because we're created in the image of God, we're deeply flawed in every aspect of our human nature. Our hearts do not naturally turn to God, our minds do not naturally believe in God, and our will do not easily submit to God. We are all capable of shameful selfishness, and we have all committed multiple sins against God. And the problem is not just that, as **Romans 3:23** says, *we all fall short* but that even our efforts to be good are compromised by half-heartedness, pride, and self-serving motives. Scripture confronts all of us with this hard but necessary truth of our shared sinfulness and our inability to save ourselves. To say something is a hard truth doesn't mean that it's bad. A diamond is hard. Because it's hard, it can cut through almost anything. Hard truths can cut through our misguided indifference,

reveal our misplaced confidence, and lead us to Christ. I read a testimony recently in which a man said he heard a particular sermon in which the message wounded his heart. That's how he described it. But he said by God's grace, *"My whole foundation was broken up, and I saw that my righteousness could not save me."* He was saying he had been religious and respectable for years, but that was the day he became a Christian!

As I said, there are two phrases we are going to focus on in this particular message. The first one was this: *put no confidence in the flesh*. The second one complements that but takes it a step further. It's found in **verse 8**. It's the phrase, *I suffer the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ*.

*Now, the question I've struggled with is how to word that as a principle that will clarify what's being taught here, so let me go with ....*

## **II. IN ORDER TO GAIN CHRIST, WE HAVE TO RENOUNCE OUR GOOD WORKS AS RUBBISH AND DEPEND ON CHRIST ALONE AS SAVIOR**

In **verses 7-8**, the Scripture says: *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as a 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*. Up to this point, he was saying his righteousness was inadequate. Now he is saying something stronger. He's not just saying, *"What I thought was to my profit I came to see as not really profitable."* He says: *"What I thought was profitable proved, in fact, to be a loss."* It wasn't an inadequate contribution. It was a costly loss. He uses the word rubbish, and that's a strong word that describes something really filthy, not just worthless but wretched.

What this Scripture is teaching is taught throughout the Scriptures. In **Isaiah 64:6**, a classic passage, it says, *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. (some version translate that "filthy rags"). We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away*. In that Scripture, God says, *"Your righteousness"*... not your sins, the things you know

you have done wrong ...but the things you have tried to do right; those things are like filthy rags when offered to God as the basis for you claiming that he should count you righteous and approve of your life.

Historians give **George Whitfield** much of the human credit for what is often called "**The Great Awakening.**" It which was a time of deep and lasting spiritual renewal that powerfully influenced England and America in the early days of our country. When George Whitfield preached, tens of thousands of people would go out to hear. He preached in the open air because many of the churches closed their doors to him because he taught that the so-called good people were just as much in need of God's mercy as anybody.

One of his more famous sermons, called "**The Method Of Grace,**" is based on a passage in **Jeremiah 6:14** where God says that false prophets have "*healed the wounds of my people lightly saying peace, peace when there is no peace.*" As Whitfield is preaching, he says, "It is possible that some of you believe you are at peace with God when you are not. Some of you may have said to you souls, "peace peace" when there is no peace. You see, he's talking about false confidence! Then he goes on to say that in order *to be* at peace with God, you need to know that you need Christ not only because of your sins but also because of your good works.

I'll paraphrase because Whitfield is speaking in the 1700s. He says,

Any poor person, when he is awakened to his obligation before God, immediately flies to his duties and performances and tries to patch up a righteousness of his own. Says he, "I will be mighty good now - - I will reform -- I will do all I can, and then certainly Jesus Christ will have mercy on me." But before you can speak peace to your heart, you must be brought to see that all your duties -- all your righteousness -- as the prophet elegantly expresses it -- put them all together, are so far from recommending you to God, are so far from being any motive and inducement to God to have mercy on your poor soul, that he will see them to be filthy rags,... God hates them and cannot but away with them (reject them) if you bring them to him in order to recommend you to his favor.

Notice what he is saying, which is as essential as it is Biblical, is that it is great to try to do good works, the things that please God. But God hates it when you come to him on the basis of those things and say to him, "Now, because of what I've done, you need to affirm and receive me." God calls us to a confidence that has nothing at all to do with ourselves and everything to do with Jesus Christ. Look again at **Philippians 3:8-9**. *For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> 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.*

So, If God were to ask you, *why should I let you into heaven? What would you say?* Think about what came to mind when I asked that earlier. And then think about what we're seeing here in the Scripture. Is there anything of you and your credentials, your history, your efforts your aspirations in your response to that question? Did you say something along the lines of, I believe in Jesus and I try to be a good Christian, I try to do the right thing, maybe I try to follow Jesus? What those answers reveal is that you are not trusting Christ alone. You are trusting in Jesus plus your works and your efforts.

Picture three circles.



Many people with some exposure to Scripture know that the way to be right with God is not through human effort or our good works alone.

But there are so many people who think the way to be right with God is through Christ plus human effort - Christ plus my contribution. What Scripture says with a humbling clarity is that we have to let go of that.

That is not what it means to trust in Jesus as your Savior! That is not faith in Christ at all. We have to renounce any claim to contributing to our salvation with anything in us. The only thing we bring to our salvation is our need for it, and our faith in Christ alone as Savior. Even faith in Christ is not a contribution we offer that has merit of some sort. It is simply the way in which we receive and rest upon Christ when we admit that there is no merit in ourselves.

Sometimes when I have asked the question, *why should God let you into heaven?* People give me an answer that mixes together what Jesus did and who Jesus is with who they are and what they've done as if it's all going to contribute and help as they work with Jesus for their salvation. When it is pointed out that the only answer that shows a true understanding of the gospel and an authentic experience of God's grace is to simply claim faith in Jesus plus nothing and minus nothing, People will say *Oh yes, I know that!* I wonder, do you really know that?

I often tell people this story. I heard of this man who went to dinner, and he took his wife, and it was a business dinner. One of his business associates came up to him and said, *"Hey, who's the most important person in your life right now?"* He said, *"My sales manager."* As soon as he said it, his wife leaned back and looked at him like, *"What did you just say?"* He looked at her and realized, you know, that wasn't the right answer, so he began back peddling and telling his wife how important she was too, but she went home wondering, *What does he really think? What does he really feel?* That's the issue. If you truly consider your very best human efforts as rubbish when it comes to being right with God or righteous in his eyes, would those things be voiced even within your own heart when asked that critical question why should God receive you into his eternal embrace?

There is nothing more liberating than to recognize that the undeserved favor of God does not depend on your credentials at all. The only one who can save your soul, forgive your sins, and bring you eternally into the embrace of the incomprehensibly great love of God is Jesus Christ. He died on the cross, suffering the penalty for our sins in our place. He rose again to save us. The only way to be right with God declared righteous in his eyes is through a faith that lets go of any other claim

but Christ. **Romans 11:6** *And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*

## **Conclusion**

So come to Christ. Let go of any thought of confidence in your works, efforts or aspiration. It's all rubbish. Let go of that and turn to Christ and trust fully and only in him. You actually can be incredibly confident of your relationship with God if - if only your confidence is not placed in yourself but in Christ as Savior! This is the beauty of God's amazing grace. When you turn from any trust in yourself to place your faith in Christ alone, God places you *in Christ* and treats you as righteous in his eyes, for Jesus' sake. Let go off everything else so you can gain him and be found in him and counted righteous for his sake by God.

Then, let your confidence in God's grace become foundational for all of life. All your life, people have been passing verdicts on your life, some positive, some negative, based on who you are and what you do. You do it to yourself also, I imagine. Even after you become a Christian, those appraisals of how you measure up stick with you. They can make you angry, anxious, defensive, hypocritical, proud, driven, and vulnerable to all kinds of temptations. Only as you deliberately lay aside those false ideas of what it means to measure up and find peace with God through faith in Christ can you begin to a new foundation for deep spiritual confidence that feels more like surrender than striving. The beauty of that deeper confidence that comes from Christ alone through faith alone is that it gives you a profound confidence without any arrogance but with an empowering and yet humble humility and gratitude that also motivates you to want to please and serve the Savior who offers you such Amazing Grace.

**Amen**

## **A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ**

Almighty God, Thank you for calling people like me to see and receive your perfect righteousness in Christ. I confess there is nothing about



who I am or anything I have done that in itself would attract your love, much less merit your gift of grace. That confession leads me not to despair but to grateful, liberating faith in Jesus. I believe Jesus died to pay for my sins and rose again as Lord and Savior. I receive and rest on him alone for my salvation. Amen

### **A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal**

Holy Father, Help me to live a life of deep faith in the renewing power of the gospel. Continually deliver me from the slavery of anxious human striving that is self-reliant and powerless. Grant me a humble, joyful confidence And the gift of righteousness that you freely give to all who place their faith in Christ alone. May your redeeming work in me overflow in a life of faith, hope, and love. In Jesus' name, Amen