

**THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**

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*Losing in Order to Win*  
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Dear radio friends,

**T**he apostle Paul, in Philippians 3:8, is caught up in a personal confession that he makes to the Philippian church. We read there: “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.”

This confession comes as a result of his reflection on his own life prior to his conversion. Paul was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee in the strictest sense. He had a name among the Jews and a title that he bore proudly. So zealous was he to maintain the outward customs and laws of the Jews that he even persecuted the church of Christ. But now he saw the fallacy and folly of his way. “What things were gain to me then,” he writes in verse 7, “those I count loss for Christ.”

After his conversion on the road to Damascus he realized that all things were but dung in light of the knowledge of his

salvation in Christ Jesus. These outward works of the law had nothing to do with his justification. They were not grounds for his salvation. In fact, they stood directly opposed to salvation in Christ.

Therefore, he gives the personal confession of the verse that we consider today.

We ought not fail to see this personal aspect of this passage. Paul exclaims: “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus *my* Lord: for whom *I* have suffered the loss of all things.” We cannot read this passage without noticing that Paul here is pouring out the thoughts of his own heart. It is this personal confession of Paul that is meant to be taken upon our lips as God’s children.

As we repeat these words of the apostle, we must be ready to make them our own. We must be ready to make them the course and the direction of our own lives in this present world. We must confess that we count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. So we bear in mind

the personal aspect of this passage.

Bearing these words in mind, we will understand what Paul means when he tells us that we must lose all in order to win Christ.

To understand the meaning of our confession, we must take careful note of what Paul is doing here in this verse. Twice in this verse, and once in the verse prior to it, we find the word "count." Paul is counting, or taking account. And what is meant by that is not merely that is Paul considering something. The term denotes a deliberate and a careful judgment that Paul makes. In other words, Paul means to say that he is taking two different things and weighing them, one over against the other. He is comparing them. He is carefully scrutinizing the advantages and disadvantages of both, the strong points as well as the weak points, and making a deliberate judgment in order to come to a determined conclusion concerning these two things. He lays them in the balance, so to speak, in order to find which one of them is of more value to him.

Furthermore, we bear in mind also that this counting, this careful weighing and comparing, Paul performs as a child of God, one in whom

Christ has worked by His Spirit. He is one who has been enlightened by the grace of God. An unbeliever would not come to the same conclusion that Paul comes to in our text. The comparing he is performing is a spiritual one that requires a heart and a soul capable of making such a value judgment. The implication is that not all men can make the careful counting that Paul does here.

But what is it that Paul compares? On the one side of the balance there are the "all things" that Paul judges over against, on the other side of the balance, the knowledge he has of Christ Jesus the Lord. Obviously the "all things" of our text is intended to be comprehensive and all-inclusive. In fact, it includes anything and everything that stands outside of that knowledge of Christ and of his salvation in Christ.

In other words, Paul looked, first of all, at everything he had or that he was in this life, whether that be his honor, his title as a Pharisee, or even his line of descent in the generations of Israel, or the laws and traditions that were his as a good Jew. Concerning these, he now makes a judgment as to their real value when compared to the knowledge that he had been given of

Jesus Christ and his salvation.

We, together with Paul, make this same deliberate judgment. How much are all the things of this present life, its fame, its glory, its prestige, its riches, in comparison to the knowledge that God has given to us in Christ and our salvation?

But there is even more yet in this comparison. We find that to be the case in verse 9 of this chapter. There Paul writes: "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." How much do I depend upon myself in my own works and righteousness to gain salvation? Is my zeal for righteousness one that I have in keeping an outward show of pioussness, in keeping outward works, and not an inner godliness of the heart? How much are all these things worth to me? All these questions we confront with Paul as we compare them with our knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord. These things are placed on the one side of the balance and weighed over against those things that are placed on the other side of the balance, which is the knowledge of Christ.

But what have we been given to know of Christ? This.

In the first place, that He is Jesus, the One who has accomplished our salvation, the One who, in His very person, is the revelation of Jehovah, the faithful God of our salvation. This Jesus saves us from our sins. That is what His name means. And He does so by going the way of the cross, paying the price of our sins, taking away our guilt, and crediting to us His righteousness in the place of our guilt. This name of our Savior speaks to us of the truth that our Savior has made us partakers of the highest possible good. He has redeemed us from corruption and restores us to the favor and friendship of God. He gives us, by means of this, a joy and peace unspeakable, a comfort that will never be gained through the earthly possessions and a rigorous keeping of the law. How wonderful a gift—to be washed in the precious blood of Jesus and to know that our sins have been forgiven us.

Secondly, the knowledge that we have of Jesus Christ is found in that name Christ. Christ means that He is the anointed One of God. He is the One who is anointed as our Prophet, Priest, and King—a blessed Mediator who performs for us the complete work of salvation. As our Prophet, He reveals to our hearts our heavenly Father and makes us to

taste and to see the riches of God's covenant established with us. As our Priest, He works in us by His Spirit consecrating us for holy toil in the service of our Lord and renewing us and cleansing us from all the filth and corruption of sin. And as our King, He alone hung on the cross and fought the fiercest of battles and emerged as the victorious One. He has conquered sin and death for us and has given us the victory.

And this Christ, in the third place, is our Lord. That is the other knowledge we have of Him. He is our Lord who has purchased us by His precious blood. He is the One who now rules over all things and directs them to our full and complete salvation. He is that Lord and Master who rules in our lives, leading and guiding us to our eternal home.

That is the knowledge, now, that we have of Jesus Christ our Lord. That knowledge is the knowledge of faith, a knowledge of the heart. Our Lord and Savior, in all of His fullness and beauty, is not just someone we examine at arms' length, but who has no real effect on our lives. If that were true of Christ, then our knowledge would not be all that precious to us personally either, would it? But our knowledge is one by which we

embrace Christ unto ourselves, and cling to Him, and trust in Him in time and eternity. And we know Christ as *our* Lord, as the only source of *our* salvation. We know that we have salvation in none other than in Jesus Christ—the salvation that is to us the most precious possession in the world. How we long to stand in the presence of God and see Him face to face! And we know, we believe, that the only way into the presence of that living God is through the precious Savior.

Do you see the value that we must find in our Savior? If we do not know or understand all that He has done for us, and if we do not fully understand the value of the cross, we will never be able to count or make proper judgment between Christ and the knowledge of Christ on the one hand, and all of the other things of this world on the other. We must know Christ spiritually. Then we are ready to make a careful and deliberate judgment between our knowledge of Him and all other things. And when we do, we will find that this is the outcome of our counting: I count all things but dung in comparison to the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.

Can you say that? Can *we* say that concerning our posses-

sions? Can we say that about our position and rank in this world? And more, can we say that about all the works that we bring forth? They are but dung. They are nothing better than a big pile of manure. Paul uses a term here that holds nothing back. All things are but dung, they are waste, they are refuse, having no value in themselves whatsoever. All things are worthless, even detestable. They are ugly to the eye and they stink. That is true of *all* things when they are compared to the knowledge that we have been given by God's grace of Christ. That wonderful knowledge of Christ and salvation is of so great a value to Paul that he finds it to be excellent. He finds this knowledge superior, far surpassing anything else that he knows in this life. It is of such surpassing worth to him that every-thing else seems to fade into the background.

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Now, because of the excellency of this knowledge of Christ, Paul cares only about one thing: that he might win Christ. That was his goal. That was his aim in life: to win Christ. And yet he knew that this winning could come only by losing, be-

cause winning Christ stands opposed to the things of this world. He could either win Christ and lose all things, or win all things and lose Christ. That is why he tells us in our text: "For Christ I have suffered the loss of all things and count them dung, that I may win Christ."

And when Paul speaks of winning Christ he does not have in mind that Christ is the great prize of some contest. Other passages of Scripture may speak in this way, but not this verse. By this term "win," Paul speaks of gaining Christ, or acquiring Christ. Paul speaks of a desire to gain Christ—that is, his goal in life, his purpose for living, is to receive or to gain to himself Christ and all the benefits of salvation that are

found in Christ. You see, when Christ went the way of the cross, He earned all these precious blessings that

come with our salvation. He is the storehouse, therefore, of all these blessings. They are of the richest value to the child of God. But in order for those blessings to become ours, the Spirit of our risen Lord must work in our hearts. And,

in order to experience those blessings, we have to come before God in faith. Since the knowledge of Christ was excellent to him, and since all else was dung, surely Paul would reach out after the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And, in this way, he willed to win Christ. In fact, looking upon the things of this earth—his place, all that he had been given—he is bold to say that he counts all of these things but loss. He believes that the things of this world can only bring disrepair and cause damage to his one true desire, his one true aim or goal. They are damaging, while the knowledge of Christ is excellent.

And that is true, too. It is exactly when we win Christ that we will lose all things. For Him, for Christ, Paul says, I have suffered the loss of all things. And I have suffered the loss of all things exactly because I belong to Jesus Christ. How did Paul lose all things? Look at who he was. He had a name in Israel. He had a title. He was a Pharisee, a teacher, well respected, of high rank among the Israelites. He lost it all. He lost his possessions. And ultimately, Paul lost his life for Christ.

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Paul did not, of himself, give up his Jewish excellencies, but Christ made him lose them on that road to Damascus. We ourselves do not just simply give up the things of this world. But when we are drawn to Jesus Christ, oftentimes we lose these things. By working in us the desire to gain only His benefits and gifts, He also so works in us that everything else is subservient to this. We are willing to give them all up for Christ. "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain," Paul states in

Philippians 1:21. That is all that counts. All the rest of the things in this life are peripheral. Even our life

itself is nothing in comparison to winning Christ.

Now, that does not mean, of course, that we must dispose of all of our possessions or rid ourselves of the titles that we have in this life. But we certainly must be willing to give them up for Christ's sake. Which would we rather gain? Would we like the riches, the fame of this world? Or do we prefer the riches that are in Christ Jesus? Which is more appealing to you and to me? That is the question that we confront in connection with

this personal confession of the apostle Paul.

Let us not forget that this *is* a personal confession that the apostle makes. For you and me to join with him in such a confession requires that we, even as he, live in faith. Faith is always necessary in order for us to make such a confession. With the heart we believe, and with the mouth we confess. When we doubt the excellency of the knowledge of Christ or when, in unbelief, we are really not all that thrilled with the knowledge of Christ, when our spiritual life is placed on a back burner and the things of this world take priority for us, if Bible reading and prayer are not worth the time of day to us, then this confession can hardly be ours. Then the balance, you see, begins to swing in the wrong direction. Unbelief does not bring such a confession to Paul's lips. And unbelief will not bring it to ours either. On the contrary, it will bring just the opposite. We will wish to gain all things and we will count the knowledge of Christ as dung. If you and I begin to place more value on the things of this world, if you and I begin to place more value on our own works rather than what Christ has done for us in this life, the balance will reflect that. If we see the knowledge of Christ as excel-

lent, over and above everything else in this life, the balance will reflect that, too.

So we examine our lives and we ask ourselves, "Can we make the same personal confession that the apostle Paul makes here?" "Yea, doubtless," we say. "Without a doubt I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus *my* Lord." That is *our* confession.

And we will always count these things but dung, because nothing is more precious to us as children of God than Jesus Christ our Lord. Is that *our* faith? And in that faith, do we make that confession? Then in that faith you and I have just won Christ.

Let us pray.

Father, we ask of Thee that Thou wilt work in our hearts by Thy Spirit and grace so that we can see the riches that are found only in Jesus Christ alone, and that, in finding those riches, we can say in our own lives that they are of far greater value to us than anything else in this life, and that we are willing to lose all in order that we might gain Christ. Make that the confession of our hearts in order that we might make that the confession of our lips, too. Bless us today by Thy Word, for Jesus' sake, Amen.