

HWMR - THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST, Week 5

Having No Confidence in the Flesh and Counting All Things to Be Loss on Account of Christ and the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ

Scripture Reading: Phil. 3:3-8

- Philippians 4: 3 For we are the circumcision, the ones who **serve** by the Spirit of God and **boast** in Christ Jesus and **have no confidence in the flesh**,
- Philippians 4: 4 Though I myself have something to be **confident of in the flesh** as well. If any other man thinks that he has confidence in the flesh, I more:
- Philippians 4: 5 **Circumcised** the eighth day; of the **race** of Israel, of the **tribe** of Benjamin, a **Hebrew born** of Hebrews; as to the law, a **Pharisee**;
- Philippians 4: 6 As to **zeal**, persecuting the church; as to the **righteousness** which is in the law, become blameless.
- Philippians 4: 7 But what things were gains to me, these **I have counted as loss on account of Christ**.
- Philippians 4: 8 But moreover **I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus** my Lord, on account of whom **I have suffered the loss** of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ

The **greatest problem** with God's children is that their **flesh** is not dealt with before the Lord. They believe in the flesh and put their trust in the flesh. The most obvious sign of unchecked flesh is self-confidence. **Self-confidence** is the characteristic of the flesh. **Philippians 3:3** says, "We are the circumcision, the ones who..have no confidence in the flesh." **To put no trust in the flesh is to have no confidence in the flesh**. All those who have been smitten by the cross are broken. Although their person may remain, they have learned to fear God and no longer put their trust and confidence in themselves. **Before** a person is dealt with by the Lord, he quickly judges anything that comes his way. He opens his mouth and **makes judgments quickly**. **But after** a person has been dealt with by the Lord, **he does not judge lightly**; he **no longer has any confidence**. No one who makes quick proposals and believes in his own strength knows the cross. Such a person has never experienced the work of the cross. Once our **flesh is circumcised**, **we will not believe in ourselves any longer**. **We will not be that full of confidence, and we will not express our opinions easily**. Before the Lord, we must see that we are weak, powerless, helpless, and faltering.

The meaning of **circumcision** is to cut off the confidence of the flesh. It is to cut off the natural strength so that one **no longer speaks and walks in a loose way**, but instead becomes a fearful and trembling person.
(The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Chapter 5, Section 4)

Day 1

I. We who **believe in Christ** should have **no confidence in the flesh**; our confidence should be wholly in the Lord—Phil. 3:3b:

- A. The **flesh** in Philippians 3:3 and 4 comprises all that we are and have in our **natural being**.
- B. In these verses **confidence in the flesh** refers to all the good items or qualifications that we have in the flesh; the honorable, lovable, and superior aspects of our natural being are still the flesh.
- C. The greatest problems among God's children are that they **do not know what the flesh is** and that their flesh has not been dealt with—Rom. 8:8; Gal. 5:24:
 1. **Self-confidence** is the characteristic of the flesh; the most obvious sign of unchecked flesh is self-confidence—cf. 3:2-3.
 2. **Confidence in the flesh keeps us from Christ**—Phil. 3:3-4, 10.

Day 2

- D. As believers in Christ, we should be those who have **no confidence** in the flesh, **no trust** in our natural ability or heritage—vv. 3-6:
 1. Although we have been regenerated, we may continue to live in our fallen nature, boast in what we do in the flesh, and have confidence in our natural qualifications—Gal. 3:2-3.

2. Only when we have been **enlightened by God** will we be able to say truly that we have no trust in our natural qualifications, ability, or intelligence; only then will we be **able to testify** that we have no confidence in the flesh and that our confidence is wholly in the Lord—Phil. 3:3; Prov. 3:5-6.

- E. If we would experience Christ, **we must not trust in the flesh but trust only in the Lord**; this is the secret to the experience of Christ—Phil. 3:3.

HAVING NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH

In verse 3 Paul also says that we have **no confidence in the flesh**. Many Christians think that having confidence in the flesh means having confidence in the sinful elements of our human nature, but this is not the meaning of flesh here. In this chapter after Paul says that he had **no confidence in the flesh**, he goes on to say that he was **circumcised** the eighth day, that he was of the **race** of Israel, that he was of the **tribe** of Benjamin, that he was a Hebrew **born** of the Hebrews, that as to the law he was a **Pharisee**, that as to **zeal** he persecuted the church, and that as to the **righteousness** which is in the law he had become **blameless**. All these things were aspects of Paul's flesh. However, probably you have never regarded such things as the flesh. We think that the flesh includes only evil things but not good things. Nevertheless, the honorable, lovable, and superior aspects of our natural being are still the flesh. All that Paul did as to the law and as to zeal was flesh and of the flesh. His righteousness as to the law was also flesh. All the seven characteristics listed by Paul in these verses are **aspects of the flesh** because they all are natural and are neither of Christ nor of the Spirit of God. **Anything natural, whether it is good or evil, is the flesh**. The Jews had confidence in their flesh, having confidence in what they were by their natural birth. But **we Christians should not have confidence in anything we have by our natural birth, for anything of our natural birth is part of the flesh**.

In order to experience Christ, we need to see that **everything we do must be by the Spirit of God, in Christ**, and with no confidence in the flesh. The flesh denotes all that we are by our natural birth. Both natural foolishness and natural wisdom are of the flesh. Do not think that foolishness is of the flesh and that wisdom is necessarily of the Spirit. **As long as it is natural, wisdom is just as fleshly as foolishness**. I repeat, in Philippians 3 Paul did not list any negative aspect of the flesh. Everything he mentioned was very good. This indicates that his concept of the flesh was vastly different from ours. To Paul, whatever he was by his natural birth was the flesh. **We should not have any confidence in our natural being**. As long as we have confidence in our natural being, we are through with the experience of Christ. (The Experience of Christ, Chapter 11, Section 5)

Day 3

II. The excellency of the knowledge of Christ is derived from the excellency of His person—v. 8; Matt. 17:5; Col. 1:13:

- A. The **excellency of the knowledge** of Christ is not the knowledge that belongs to Christ, the knowledge that Christ Himself has; rather, this knowledge is **our subjective knowing of Christ**—John 17:3:
 1. In Philippians 3:8 knowledge actually means a **revelation**, a **vision**, concerning Christ and His excellency—Gal. 1:15-16; Eph. 1:17-23.
 2. When Christ was revealed to him by God, Paul saw the supereminence, the supreme preciousness, and the surpassing worth of Christ—Acts 9:3-5, 20, 22; 22:13-16; 26:13-16.
- B. The excellency of the knowledge of Christ is the excellency of Christ **realized by us**—John 16:13-14; Gal. 1:15-16:
 1. We need to have a **vision of the preciousness** of Christ and the excellency of the knowledge of the all-inclusive, unlimited Christ—1 Pet. 2:4, 7; Col. 1:12, 15-19; 2:2-3, 9, 16-17; 3:4, 10.

REVELATION AND EXPERIENCE

Paul lived in a condition of **not** having his own righteousness **but** having **the righteousness of God**, in order to know (to experience) Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. **To have the excellency of the knowledge of Christ in verse 8 is by revelation**. But to know Him in verse 10 is by **experience**—to have the experiential knowledge of Him, to experience Him in the full knowledge of Him. Paul first received the revelation of Christ and then sought for the experience of Christ—to know and enjoy Him in an experiential way.

After we **receive** the **excellency of the knowledge** of Christ, we shall **be willing to suffer the loss of all things and count them refuse** in order to gain Christ and be found in Him. As a result, we shall know Christ experientially. Therefore, verse 9 comes out of verse 8, and verse 10 comes out of verse 9. **If we do not** have the **excellency of the knowledge** of Christ (v. 8), **we shall not be found in Christ**, for **it is having the excellency of the knowledge of Christ which makes us willing to suffer the loss of all things and count them as refuse in order to gain Christ and be found in Him**. Then, once we have gained Christ and are found in Him, we shall know Him; that is, we shall enjoy Him and experience Him.

To **gain** Christ is one thing, and to **experience** Him is another. We may illustrate this difference by the difference between buying groceries and eating food which has been purchased and prepared. Gaining Christ may be compared to buying groceries, and the experience of Christ may be compared to the eating of the food we have first purchased and cooked. However, before we buy any groceries, we must first have the excellency of the knowledge of groceries. Before we purchase anything, we are first attracted by the excellency of the knowledge of that thing. Thus, first we have the excellency of the knowledge of the groceries, then we gain them by buying them, and finally we enjoy the food by eating it. In like manner, Paul first **received** the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, then he **paid the price** to gain Christ and **be found in Him**, and finally he **experienced** Christ and **enjoyed** Him. Paul realized that to gain Christ and be found in Him always results in knowing Him, in enjoying and experiencing Him. (Life-Study of Philippians, Chapter 21, Section 1)

Day 4

2. The excellency of the knowledge of Christ **comes by revelation**; without the revelation concerning Christ, we cannot know Christ—Matt. 16:17; 11:27; Gal. 1:15-16; John 17:3.
- C. If we would experience Christ, **we first need to have the excellency of the knowledge of Christ**—Phil. 3:7-10:
 1. We cannot experience Christ without knowing Him through a revelation of Him—Gal. 1:15-16; 2:20; 4:19.
 2. If we do not have a higher revelation of Christ, we cannot have a higher experience of Christ—1 John 5:20.
 3. Our experience of Christ cannot surpass the excellency of our knowledge of Christ—Eph. 1:17-21; 3:14-19.

Day 5

III. On account of (or because of) the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, Paul counted all things to be loss—Phil. 3:8a:

- A. Paul placed **great value on the excellency of the knowledge** of Christ Jesus; this is indicated by the words **my Lord**, which convey his intimate, tender feelings concerning Christ.
- B. Paul's eyes were opened to see the excellency of the wonderful, all-inclusive Christ; on account of this excellency, he **counted as loss all things**, whether they related to religious gain or natural gain.
- C. In verse 8 all things indicates that Paul **dropped** not only religious things but **all things** on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus; thus, to Paul, **the loss of all things was the loss of everything**.
- D. The more we have the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, the more we will count as loss everything religious and natural—vv. 4-8a.

SAUL OF TARSUS AS A MODEL OF THE JUDAIZERS

According to verses 4 through 6, Paul had been a model of the Judaizers: *"Though I myself could have confidence also in the flesh; if any other man thinks to have confidence in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day; of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, persecuting the church; as to the righteousness which is in the law, become blameless."* When Paul used to be among the Judaizers, he had been very active and had many outstanding qualifications.

A. Having More Confidence in the Flesh

A former leading one among the Judaizers, Paul had more reason than others to have **confidence in the flesh**. In Galatians 1:14 he tells us that he "advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my race, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." In a very real sense, Paul had been a "top dog" among the Judaizers.

B. Circumcised the Eighth Day

In verse 5 Paul says that he was circumcised the eighth day, the day for **a genuine Israelite** to be circumcised (Gen. 17:12). This day distinguished him from the Ishmaelites and proselytes, who were circumcised later. Paul was a typical Jew, not a proselyte. This gave him ground to boast when he was a Judaizer.

C. Of the Race of Israel

Paul was also of the race of Israel, God's **called race**, the genuine seed of Abraham (Rom. 11:1; 2 Cor. 11:22). He was not a descendant of the proselytes grafted into the race of God's covenant.

D. Of the Tribe of Benjamin

Paul could also be confident in the fact that he was of the tribe of Benjamin. This was a lovely and **faithful tribe**, among whom was the royal city of Jerusalem **with the temple of God** (Deut. 33:12).

E. A Hebrew of the Hebrews

Paul also says that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was a **Hebrew born** of Hebrew parents with Hebrew ancestry on both sides. Furthermore, his grandparents on both sides were Hebrews as well. Only such a one could say that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. A **full-blooded Hebrew**, he could boast that he was of pure Hebrew blood.

F. A Pharisee Keeping the Law

In verse 5 Paul tells us that, as to the law, he was a **Pharisee**. The law here is the law of Moses respected by all orthodox Jews. As a Pharisee, Paul was a member of the strictest sect of the Jewish religion (Acts 26:5; 23:6), a sect exceedingly zealous for the law of Moses. The Pharisees were proud of their superior sanctity of life, devotion to God, and knowledge of the Scriptures.

G. Persecuting the Church out of Zeal for the Law

Out of zeal for the law and Judaism, Paul persecuted the church. When Paul says, “as to zeal, persecuting the church,” he refers to **zeal for the law** of Moses and the Jewish religion (Gal. 1:14). Those Jews who persecuted the church were certainly among the leading ones in Judaism. No one could surpass them in their zeal. Paul boasted in his zeal in persecuting the church.

H. Blameless according to the Law

Finally, Paul says that “as to the righteousness which is in the law,” he was found, or proven, **blameless**. This, of course, was in the eyes of man according to man's judgment. In the eyes of God, according to His righteous law, no flesh is blameless (Gal. 2:16).

It is important that we all be deeply and personally touched by these verses in Philippians 3. We need the Lord's light to shine on us concerning our **nature**, our **deeds**, and our confidence in the **flesh**. If we are **enlightened** by the Lord, we shall confess that although we have been regenerated to become children of God with the divine life and nature, we still live too much in our “dog” nature. Yes, we have a right to proclaim the fact that we are children of God. But if this declaration is contrasted with our daily experience, it may be little more than a doctrine to us. One day, when **the light shines** on you concerning this, you will want to prostrate yourself before the Lord and confess how unclean your nature is. Then you will condemn everything you do by your fallen nature. You will see that in the eyes of God whatever is done in the fallen nature is evil and worthy of condemnation. Formerly, we boasted in our deeds and qualifications. But the time will come when instead of boasting in the flesh with its qualifications, we shall condemn it. Then **we shall boast in Christ alone**, realizing that in ourselves we have absolutely no ground for boasting.

Only when we have been **enlightened** by God shall we be able to say truly that **we have no trust in our natural qualifications, ability, or intelligence**. Only then shall we be able to testify that our confidence is wholly in the Lord. After we are enlightened in this way, we shall be able to experience Christ. I hope that many among us will see this light and turn from a mere objective understanding of these verses to the subjective enjoyment and experience of Christ. (Life-Study of Philippians, Chapter 17, Section 3)

IV. On account of Christ, Paul suffered the loss of all things and counted them as refuse in order to gain Christ—vv. 7, 8b:

- A. **All things** in verse 8 includes the things of **religion, philosophy, and culture**; Paul suffered the loss of all these things because they were **substitutes for Christ**, hooks used by Satan to keep people from Christ and the experience of Christ.

Day 6

- B. We **gain Christ** by **suffering the loss of all things** that were once a gain for us and by **counting them as refuse**—vv. 4, 8:
1. The Greek word for gain in verse 8 means “to secure, to obtain, to lay hold of.”
 2. To gain Christ is to gain His person, to experience, enjoy, and take possession of all His unsearchable riches—Eph. 3:8.
 3. Like Paul, we should not only **count all things as loss** on account of Christ (Phil. 3:7) but also **suffer the loss of all things** and **count all things as refuse** (v. 8).
 4. The more we suffer the loss of all things and count them as refuse on account of Christ, the more we will gain Christ for our experience and enjoyment—vv. 7-8.

COUNTING THINGS AS LOSS THAT ONCE WERE GAINS

In order to experience Christ, **we must learn to count as loss things that were once gains to us**. We need to **count every gain as loss for Christ**. There is no comparison between any gain and Christ. If you make such a comparison, you will count everything as loss. The reason we regarded certain things as gains in the past was that we did not know Christ. But once our eyes were opened to see Christ, we realized how foolish it was to keep those other things. Because Paul had this vision, he could say, “What things were gains to me, these I have counted as loss on account of Christ” (v. 7).

Only **by serving by the Spirit of God, by boasting in Christ Jesus, and by not having any confidence in our flesh** can we be acceptable to God. These three things are basic for the experience of Christ. If we see these things, we will spontaneously count all things as loss for Christ. We will not treasure them anymore. We will realize that even the best worship of God is the barking of a dog if it is done without the Spirit of God. Even the best things apart from Christ are evil works in the eyes of God. This includes our love, our humility, and our patience. We also need to see that **God has no interest in our flesh**. If we see this, we will have no confidence in the flesh. If we have the vision regarding these three things, a good foundation will be laid for the experience of Christ. (The Experience of Christ, Chapter 11, Section 5)