

Rich Nathan
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Philippians Series
Philippians 3:1-9

How To Have a Christian Value System

This morning I want to talk about the issue of values because it seems that we are hearing more and more about the crisis of values in the United States right now. In fact, a lot of people are suggesting that the problems that this country faces are not problems of money or the economy or politics at all. A lot of folks are saying that the crisis in the United States regarding such things as crime and failure in schools and the educational system, the crisis in the family in terms of family break down and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, the lowering of the bar of popular culture in terms of the expression of vulgarity in music and on television, the whole course of public discourse, that all that we are seeing really has to do with a crisis of values, not a crisis of the economy. What we are struggling with politically right now is an issue of a conflict of values.

Such people as William Bennett, who is the former Secretary of Education, have come out very strongly. I have mentioned his book before, but in his *Book of Virtues* he says that what is really necessary is a recovery of certain lost values—values like hard work and personal responsibility and the values of friendship and the value of fidelity and faithfulness. Because these things have been set aside and we don't understand how to have a friend and to be a friend and how to be faithful and how to work hard, we have a big problem in the United States.

Now, I was thinking about the issue of values and how it is that there are moments in our lives when we take stock of things and when we begin to ask ourselves in

a fresh way whether we are living for the right things. Whether our values have been in the right place and whether we have properly valued things in proportion to each other. There are these special moments, I believe, when almost all people step back and say, “Have I done things well? Have I valued the right things?”

I think of such inquiries as often taking place during moments of transition. For example, a child goes off to college and leaves home. It is the most natural thing in the world for parents to ask: “Here we had 18 years of time with our child. Did we waste it? Did we put into our child the things that really count and matter? Looking at the way our child is living and what our child values, did they pick up the right things from us? Did they pick up bad things from us?”

Moments of transition are often times when people are able to step back, away, from simply running the machine of life and survey a little bit: What have I been doing and what have I been investing in? Certainly, as people make changes from church to church, or from job to job, those transitional times are times when we have the opportunity to reevaluate and to check our value system again.

It is also the case that we tend to have those times of reevaluation during moments of loss and trials. For example, when you lose a parent. Your mom dies or your dad dies. It is, again, the most natural thing in the world to step back for a time of reflection and say: What was the nature of my relationship with my father or mother? Could it have been different? Could I have done better? Could I have communicated love in a way different than I did now that they are gone and I only have one mother or one father? Have I wasted my opportunities or did I use them?

People go through a reevaluation time as they go through a divorce or separation – Why is this happening to me? I found that when I went to the hospital that just a brief

stay in the hospital, a time of loss, at least loss of the normal activity, a loss of health, was very helpful in getting me to think again about what I cared about and what mattered. You know, there are these special windows of opportunity to really reevaluate your values and to see how exactly you are living.

Sometimes those windows of opportunity take place during moments of disillusionment when people or things or jobs or activities that you put a lot of stock in suddenly get reframed in your mind and you realize that you have been investing in a losing proposition. You know, I put so much time into this stupid job and after all of that and my faithful investment, coming in early, taking work home late, they laid me off and hired the owner's son. They promoted somebody else above me. They changed my job description so that I have really, in essence, gotten a demotion. Disillusioning experiences are often those opportunities for reframing.

Disillusioning experiences with people. You know, I have put so much of my heart into this relationship or into that church. And now, I realize that there was something significantly off and it is causing me to have to go through a process of rethinking. Where does church fit into the overall framework of my life? How much of an investment should I make in ministry and God's people? In family life?

I believe that moments of reflection and reevaluation are special gifts from God. I know that they are often hard, that they are painful. But I believe that when God pops open a window for you to see and to reflect, that is a gift. And you need to use that gift because the window of opportunity doesn't stay there for long and it is easy for us to walk away unchanged. To change nothing about how we are living lives as husbands or wives, friends, lovers, co-workers, especially toward adopting a Christian value system.

It is often the case that people do not understand the values of a Christian. I just recently read a *Sports Illustrated* article about Coach Bill McCartney from Colorado who recently resigned his head coaching position at the University of Colorado. He cited for his reasons for resigning that he wanted to spend more time with his wife. Now, the writer of *Sports Illustrated* couldn't conceive that that could possibly be the reason why Coach McCartney was retiring. After all, the job that he had was a prime coaching job. He was making close to half a million dollars a year. And so the article was written from the perspective that there obvious had to be a different angle to McCartney's decision than merely spending time with his wife.

I have no idea if Bill McCartney is telling the truth or not. I assume he is and that he wants to spend more time with his wife, but there is all of this speculation about how he really has an angle to get another job in coaching, perhaps moving into the pro's, that he has a business on the side, that he is getting involved in a major run for Congress in a right-wing campaign. All of this discussion because folks are not using the frame work of values that McCartney is using or, at least, saying that he is using for making a decision.

Well, do not expect if you grow in your adoption of Christian values that people around you will understand why you are doing what you are doing. Because often, they won't.

The apostle Paul had a moment, a moment when his values got turned utterly upside down. A moment that shattered his entire value system. You may know the story, because it forms a backdrop for the passage that I am going to be speaking out of today. The shattering moment for the apostle Paul was a time when he was on his way to Damascus, believing in the rightness of his position, determined and zealous about his

religious convictions, thinking that his whole orientation toward God was exactly right, without a doubt in his mind that things in his life were drastically wrong, completely self-confident, self-assured. And as he was traveling toward Damascus, he had a shattering moment when everything got turned upside down and he saw Jesus Christ.

It was a time of reevaluating his values. It was a time of personal revolution in Paul's life. The shattering that God brought in was a gift to the apostle Paul and to the world through Paul because of what Paul became. Paul saw Jesus Christ and because of that experience of seeing, Paul's value system was shattered.

Now, I believe that all of us will one day have the same experience that the apostle Paul had as he was on his way to Damascus. All of us, one day, will see Jesus Christ as clearly as Paul did. Now, for some of us that will be the fulfillment of a life and a direction and a pursuit that we have been engaged in for 30 or 50 years. All of our longings and all that we have spent ourselves on and all of our hard work and all of our yearnings, it will all be fulfilled at that moment when we see him and we say that it was all worth it. I am not at all a loser. It was entirely worth it. In fact, I had no idea that you would be as good and as wonderful and as lovely as you are. I am so glad that I gave my life to a person like you, Jesus.

The Bible tells us that we will all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ; we all will be entirely alone looking into the face of Christ, whether you believe or your don't believe, it doesn't matter. You will see Jesus Christ one day. You will have a Damascus road experience like Paul did when suddenly you see Christ. That day will be the ultimate moment of learning new values. And you know, I have a different view of judgment and the picture of judgment, particularly upon those who have refused to repent of their sins, who have kept Christ at arm's length their whole lives, people who have

heard the message of a need to turn to Christ and have just said: Not now, not me, not worth it. I have a different view of judgment upon those who have held Christ at arm's length their whole lives, who have not given themselves entirely to the pursuit of Jesus than maybe a lot of other people do. Because the image that comes to mind for a lot of folks when they think about being put out of the presence of Christ is that when that person who has been holding Christ at arm's length saying "not now," sees Jesus they will see the terrible, horrible, vengeance of God. Jesus will look so awful, so frightening, so terrible in his judgment that the person will run out of his presence in fear and in trembling, screaming as a person would running from a murderer or run when their life was in danger. That is many people's view of what the judgment day will be like when we all see Jesus.

You know, I am not sure that is the proper picture. In fact, I think there is a different one indicated by the Bible. I think the awfulness of judgment is precisely that people who have held Christ at arm's length all their life suddenly see Jesus in all of his goodness, in all of his wonderful beauty and his grace and they realize that Jesus is so good. That they have held themselves back from satisfaction and from real joy. From the only person who could ever supply them with true fulfillment and true meaning and purpose. They will look into the eyes of perfect love and they will say, "My God, how could I ever thought of you the way that I did? How could I have ever spent my life on things that didn't matter? Why didn't I value you more? I spent my life building sand castles. I could have valued you, but I didn't." And then they will be pulled out of the presence of God with the door shut forever. Their last vision will be the vision of the love of God from which they are eternally separated.

It is for that reason that the Bible says that people will be knocking on the door, begging to get in. Not because they had a horrible view of God, but because they saw God in the face of Christ and saw his utter love that they will be pounding on the door, weeping and gnashing their teeth, because of the profound regret of a life wasted and of eternity spent separated from the arms of love and the heart of love that exists in the person of Christ. There will be profound regret as people realize that.

Well, this morning I have chosen to begin with that kind of sobering thought because I want to talk today about adopting a Christian value system. I cannot create a moment in which you step back and take a look at where things are relative to other things in your life and where Christ is relative to everything else. But I am going to ask God to bring moments of reevaluation into your life and to challenge you through this talk toward valuing Christ. Let's ask God's presence and pray.

Philippians 3:1-9:

“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my

profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

We are talking about learning to have a Christian value system, perhaps discovering some things that we need to place value on that we are not. The first thing that the apostle Paul tells us is that what we really need to value is rejoicing in the Lord. Verse 1: “Finally, my brothers [and I will add sisters], rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again and it is a safeguard for you.”

Now, I really appreciate a couple of things that Paul is saying in this statement. He says, first of all, that he has to continually encourage the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord, to remind them of the same thing over and over again, but that his need for repetition regarding the same lesson is not a burdensome thing to him. Paul is basically saying, “Hey, I don’t mind. It is not troubling to me that I have to repeat myself with you a number of times.”

Now, one of the side lessons that I would derive from this is a lesson in leadership. For those of you who are leaders, I want you to hear this. Good leaders understand the value of repetition. The essence of leadership, indeed, is repetition. The apostle Paul uses the word “joy” in this letter or some form of rejoicing sixteen times. Over and over again, he exhorts the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord and this is not burdensome to him because he understands that leaders repeat themselves over and over

again. Good coaches, for example, in basketball do not simply roll the ball out to the middle of the court and say, “Okay, guys, play ball. I will sit here on the bench.” Instead, they go through passing drills over and over again. Okay, now we are going to move our feet on defense. And all we are going to practice for the next half an hour and then we will do it every day, is how to move your feet. How to move with a defender. How to look at their hips. Don’t look at their hands, look at their hips.

You think about the amount of drilling that takes place in the Army because those leaders know that habits take a long time to develop in an individual’s life. People do not pick up a new habit, especially a new value, the first time. Folks might get a little more information, but to have something become an automatic so that under pressure a certain behavior comes out, that takes repetition.

I see that with Jesus. Many times he gives the same teaching again in a slightly different form than he gave before. A lot of times you may have wondered about this as you read through the gospels. Gee, this passage in Luke sounds vaguely like a passage that I read in Matthew only it is a little different. What gives? I believe that Jesus gave the same teaching in a number of different settings on different occasions and often to the same group of people because he wanted to make sure that these lessons got inculcated into their lives and became automatic.

So Paul says what I want to have automatic in you is an ingrained value that when you are under pressure, when you are squeezed, what comes out is rejoicing in the Lord. But that will take repetition; that will take practice – three steps forward, two steps back, over and over again. Now listen, he is writing to a group of people that as we discovered last week and in previous weeks, he is writing to a group of people who when they were squeezed had an automatic response of grumbling and complaining. The apostle Paul is

saying to people and he is saying to many of you who fall into a pattern of continual self-pity or grumbling, “Why me? Why do I have to go through this? What is the matter?” You fall into a pattern of discouragement very often. You go for a little while and then you are flat again. All the air goes out of your tires. You are constantly worried about how people are treating you and your rights. He is saying that you have to have in your life a practice, a habit more powerful as a value and as a behavior than the habit of grumbling and complaining. And what he suggests is more compelling and more powerful is learning to rejoice in the Lord.

By rejoicing in the Lord, he means that when you are flat and something has happened to you where you are sinking into self-pity again, and grumbling, you need something stronger to deal with that than a washed out, wimpy, “Oh, God. Help my attitude.” Just riding it out and then afterwards slapping yourself for falling into the same pattern again of “Look what I have just been spending the last day doing. Just complaining all day.”

He said, “No, no, no. I want you to have something in your life that can really deal with the habit of complaining and what is going to deal with it is your ability to in the moment thrill in God.” To exult in him, to stir yourself up, to let your whole being in a moment be filled with gratitude to God for who God is and how good God is and how wonderful God is despite everything that is going on around you and everything that has been coming to you.

God, you are so patient. God, you are so wonderful. God, you have been so good to me. I am so thankful that I get to know God. And sometimes you need to shout this aloud, which I do as I am driving and I am being bombarded with thoughts and all of the pressure and so on. I just shout to the Lord.

He says that if you will do that, it will be [now note these words]: “It is no trouble for me to write these things to you again and it is a safeguard for you.” Rejoicing in the Lord, in other words, is a means of protection for you from the kind of attack of discouragement that you are experiencing. Let me put it in different words. Worship is a major weapon in spiritual warfare. Worship is a way out of a lot of our temptations.

You know, the Old Testament, as we often have learned here in this church, is a physical picture of spiritual principles that God wants to teach us about spiritual realities. And in the Old Testament, one of the ways that the children of Israel went to do battle with their enemies in a real physical way was to send out the Levites to lead the armies in worship. And as the army began to worship, God went to battle on the Israelites’ behalf and defeated the enemy before them. And if you want a scripture reference for that, look at 2 Chronicles 20 and how Jehoshaphat encouraged the people to worship on their way into battle. Now, I believe that is a picture of spiritual warfare. When you are defeated and down, when you are discouraged, that if you turn to God and stir into your being real worship of God, you will find the enemy driven off the field by the power of the Lord. Now, brothers and sisters, I have a word and I want you to hear this, not as condemnation or that I am shaking my finger at you in any way and scolding you. I want you to hear this as a word from your pastor who really loves you and wants to encourage the best in you. Many of you are not taking that first half hour of time that we spend here in worship at Vineyard and trying to worship God. You know, some of you are regularly coming in at 20 minutes after the hour and finding a seat. Then, you are just settling down and maybe you are chatting a little bit. I sure understand that, but I am telling you that your spiritual life will change if you get here and get yourself ready to start worshipping when the band starts up at 9:00 a.m. And you take that half hour which may be the only time

that you can do this during the week, to take a half an hour to present yourself to God because of all the pressures that are going on in your life. You just don't have that space. You turn to the Lord and rejoice in him. I am telling you that you will find a difference in your spiritual life.

And, you know, really really focus on God and use the words of the songs to direct your minds and hearts toward God. And it may be uncomfortable at first, but you may wish to begin to learn how to raise your hands.

You say, "Well, why should I do that?"

Well, it is not essential. But you know, our hearts will often follow our bodies. And the reason why in the Bible people raised their hands to worship, [some of you may say that it looks peculiar] but in the Bible people raised their hands in worship: 1) as an act of surrender—you know, I give up; and 2) it is an act of openness and receptivity. My being is open to the Lord as I lift my hands. We are saying to God, "Come and touch me. I am open to you and to what you have to say to me."

Brothers and sisters, as a church we really need to spend that time in worship.

And the apostle Paul tells us that there are some things that can confuse us. Some things can confuse us as we consider where God should fit into our lives and whether we need to make some adjustments and changes in some of our choices. There are some things that can really obscure our ability to make those changes and that is in verse 2.

"Watch out for those dogs [he says] those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh, for it is we who are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God who glory in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh."

What he is saying is that as you are trying to place value on Christ, one of the things that you are going to have to pay attention to in your life is the drift toward empty

religion, toward form and toward performance over against the intimacy and relationship and substance that God is really looking for. In other words, you must watch out for merely external religion that doesn't involve your heart. Adopting Christian values is not simply a matter of learning a bunch of new behaviors - "Oh, I am a Christian because I now go to church and say the right things, saying "Praise the Lord!" when you slam a car door on your hand." No, learning Christian values is a matter of a new heart.

There were people in Paul's day that he calls the "dogs." And Paul is using that phrase in an ironic kind of fashion in that these people that were known as "Judaizers", people who put a lot of stock into religious ritual, they were Jewish people, who went around into the churches and told the church members, whether Jewish or Gentile, that the men, if they weren't circumcised, needed to be circumcised. And they needed to observe all of the Old Testament rituals. And they needed to follow certain kinds of forms. These people who were infiltrating the church, used to themselves regard Gentile people as dogs. And Paul turns the thing around and says, "Let me tell you who the real dogs are. The dogs are these guys who are coming in who are the Judaizers."

Now Paul is not making an anti-Semitic statement. He, himself, was a Jew. And he loved his own people. His concern was about folks who modeled empty religion. And in that regard, Paul was standing in a long line of the prophets going way back into the Old Testament who challenged people in their faith regarding whether their heart was really in what they were doing.

See, this is the tendency in religion and in every church to just drift into a rote, repetition of the same old, same old, without our hearts. Paul said that the confusing thing in dealing with God is that your heart may not be where your mouth is. It is very possible to say three "Our Fathers" or some other memorized prayer or to sing Vineyard

worship songs and to do it in a completely empty way. This was the thing that Jesus always dealt with in religious people. We come near to God with our lips, but we are not giving him our hearts. He said that you come near with your lips, but your hearts are far from me.

And so in thinking through where you are at with Christ and real Christianity, you have to watch this continual drift toward empty religion. It is a cheap substitute for the real thing. I call it veneer religion. It is just veneer over the top of a particle board. It is very confusing and you may think: “No, I am in a good place” until you stop and examine and say: “You know, I am very concerned about where I am personally at because I think that I am just going through the motions. I am just on automatic pilot.” Brothers and sisters, I am concerned for this church because the stream of human tendency is toward just rote repetition, toward empty form and predictability, superficiality, toward the hollowing out of heart and our values. So that what we are left with is the form and the look, but it is hollow; it is veneer, not solid wood. We have the organization but not the organism, the look but not the life.

I am talking to all of you about values today because it really takes work to not drift into hollowness. We must work together as a church to continually pray and fight the drift. “God, keep the heart in the Vineyard. Renew us.”

And then Paul wonderfully turns to himself and says, “Now I want to give you, by way of my own personal experience, a lesson about the importance of valuing Christ above everything else.” You know, it is not necessary for all of us to learn every lesson in the school of hard-knocks. We don’t all have to learn our values by going about things the wrong way, beating our heads into the wall, and discovering that there is a doorway and we can get through the doorway. We don’t all have to put our hand on a hot stove

before we learn that the stove burns. It is possible to learn values differently. We don't all have to learn how devastating an affair can be, or, by way of contrast, how to live life the right way. There can be fathers in the church, people who care enough to provide some guidance for someone younger. We can learn values from the experience of someone else.

And so Paul says, "I want to talk with you about my experience regarding success and independence and self-reliance and tell you where my life went." He says, "Though I, myself, have reason for confidence in the flesh, if anyone thinks he has reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. By "confidence in the flesh" Paul means self-reliance so strong that a person doesn't feel a need for Christ. Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless."

Here is what Paul was saying. He is saying: I want to communicate to you that the major obstacle in your ability to value a relationship with Christ and to count him as everything in your life is going to be your own success in life. In fact, the better life goes for you, the harder it is going to be for you to value Christ.

The apostle Paul, in talking about the problem of handling success, and dealing with all the good things that life has to offer, wants to tell us that he is not speaking as somebody who never had success. He is not simply mouthing sour grapes as somebody who was a life-long have-not. A person who never really did very well and just likes to take pot shots at the successful. So many of the attacks on wealth and on success and on intellectuals come from those people who have never been wealthy, who have never succeeded, who have never been at the top, who have never been good students. One

suspects that many of the attacks from below are springing out of covetousness or envy or jealousy. That what we have are folks who are “wanna-be’s”, but who never were.

And Paul says: I want you to know that when I am talking about the dangers of success, I am not talking as a wanna-be. You know, the guy who was always the last in the class. I am not talking as Paul who is a guy who always had to stand in the corner at school. I am talking as a guy who understands what it is to be at the top of the class, to be a total success, to have everything go well, and who understands that in that position, you are in great spiritual danger.

He gives us his resume so that we really understand that here is a guy who had all of the credentials. When he talks about being circumcised on the eighth day, he is saying: I am a true Jew who began life in exactly the right way from my earliest childhood my parents raised me as a Jew. Jewish males are circumcised on the eighth day, as I was, and other Jewish boys are if they are raised in conformity to the orthodox law. There never was a time in Paul’s life when he didn’t have impeccable pedigree and credentials.

It says: Born of the nation of Israel, with all the rights and privileges of being one of the chosen people of God. Of the tribe of Benjamin. There is quite a bit of pride in the particular part of Israel that Paul came from. He didn’t come from just any tribe. It was the tribe of Benjamin who was one of the two sons of Rachel, the favored wife of Jacob, along with Joseph the other great tribe that came from Rachel’s body was Benjamin. Benjamin, you might know, was the only one of the twelve who was born in the promised land. Everyone else was born somewhere else. And it was from Benjamin that the first king of Israel was born, namely King Saul. Benjamin was privileged to have the city of Jerusalem within its borders. Jerusalem is wholly contained by the original

allotment of land given to Benjamin. And Benjamin was one of the two tribes to remain loyal to King David, along with Judah, and of course, Benjamin was always spoken of as a leading tribe in battle. If you look back at Judges 5 and Hosea, you know, “We will follow you, O Benjamin.” It was a tribe that was quite esteemed of the tribes in Israel even though it was a small tribe.

And then he says, “I am a Hebrew born of Hebrews” which in Paul’s day meant that he wasn’t raised in an assimilated family. You know, one of the Hellenistic Jews that had adopted Greek customs and Gentile ways and spoke Greek at home. No. Paul’s parents spoke Hebrew in the house, kept kosher, he identified with Jewish purity. He wasn’t just a cultural Jew. He was a religious Jew, raised in a religious family.

With regards to the law, it says that he was a Pharisee. His parents were Pharisees, which was the strictest sect of the Jewish people. And his parents made sure that Paul went to the best schools and trained under the best rabbis. It is like parents today who send their children to the very best prep schools and make sure they go to the very best boarding schools so that they will end up in the best Ivy League college.

And all of this is by way of background, by way of inheritance, by way of heritage. And then Paul says, “Not only by way of background and by heritage do I have all of the credentials, but by way of what I made myself, by way of personal choice, by way of what I built on the foundation of my inheritance, I did great.” He is like the guy who gets the business that is a major money maker from his father, and then uses that business to propel himself forward to make another fortune. He said: I made a fortune of what my father gave me. As for zeal, persecuting the church.

There is a little side note that I want, by way of parenthesis, I want to make a remark here regarding “according to zeal, a persecutor of the church”. Because zeal is

one of those virtues that is highly praised, along with education, family background and wealth. People really value commitment. One of the things that you will get patted on the back for is your ability to focus and be committed. People love committed people. Wow! Look at how focused he is. Look at how committed she is. You know, this person will walk through a wall, in order to achieve a goal. And when that is turned toward the Lord, that zeal, wow, they will take that mountain for Christ. Look at them go for it.

But when zeal is not tempered with love, then what ends up happening is what happened in the life of Paul. Paul ended up wounding the true people of God, the church. He says: As for zeal, a true persecutor of the church, I want you to know that people who are zealous for Christ and zealous for the truth, who do not have in their hearts a perfected love will always end up wounding other Christians in the process. There will be around zealous people who are not lovers leaving bloody bodies everywhere. You know, the person is going for their goals, for truth – we are committed to the truth here, or to gaining the lost – but left in their wake is a host, a multitude of wounded people. Just as in business, that climber, that striver, that person who claws their way to the top will leave blood in their wake. Push, push, push. We have to work harder. We have to work 75 or 80 hours a week. All around such a person is devastation and broken families and wounded homemakers. That is what happens with zeal.

As for zeal, he said, I became a persecutor of the church. Desiring so much to have the Jewish people be pure, I ended up wounding the true children of God.

And as for legalistic righteousness, that means conformity to all of the laws. I was blameless. I did the law, at least in an outward way and external conformity to law, I performed up to standard. All the advantages that I had in life, both advantages that came

to me from my family background, and advantages that I created by my own hard work and my own commitments and my own choices—all these advantages ended up for me being obstacles in really valuing Christ.

“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus.”

Paul says: Let me express to you so that you understand this principle of values that I am trying to explain, let me put it in terms of an accounting ledger. And on the one side of the ledger we have the asset column. Here is the way that I used to look at life. I put in the asset column my Jewish background and the way that I was raised and my education and my intelligence and my zeal and my hard work and my conformity to the commandments and my rabbinic training. All the things that people praise me for and that I patted myself on the back for, those I put in the asset column.

And to update it, you could say that you could put in the asset column your education, your looks if you are an attractive person, your wealth if you have money, and people’s approval and your popularity and your winning personality and your street-smarts and your savvy. Your ability to get along with people and your social skills. The fact that you are likable. You could put all of that in the asset column.

Paul says that in that shattering moment on the Damascus road when he saw Jesus Christ for the first time, all of the things that he formerly considered assets got moved over on the accounting ledger to the liability column. They all became losses.

There is nothing wrong with being wealthy. There is nothing wrong with a great education. There is nothing wrong with hard work, with being good looking. He is not attacking any of that as somebody who was a have-not. He was a have. Paul had it all.

He understood success. He understood that life is a lot easier and more comfortable when you have all of life humming and everything is working out well for you.

So, in what sense did all of these assets, humanly speaking, get moved over in the accounting ledger to become liabilities? Well, in these two senses: People's assets become liabilities because they dull a person's sense of need for God, for relationship with Christ. Christians should be very clear about this truth and hold it in front of them. Always remember that your advantages can easily become disadvantages when it comes to relationship with God.

Listen, the Bible does not condemn wealth. What the Bible condemns is what wealth can potentially do to a person which is to dull their sense of need for Christ. Like the man in Luke 13 who had a huge farm and built bigger and better barns and stored up all of his wealth and gave no thought to God. Wealth potentially can dull your sense of need for a profound relationship with Jesus and utter dependence on Christ. That is the danger of wealth. That you would get barricaded behind your intelligence, your success, your promotion so that more and more you get dulled to God, more distant from the Lord so that you can no longer hear the voice of God because you have turned from God to your success.

And so one of the things that were considered gain in the past, when you discover God and you have one of those moments of reevaluation, you realize: Man, all that stuff was getting in the way.

I had a wonderful conversation several years ago with a former pro football quarterback, who played for several teams. He told me that he was drafted ahead of Dan Marino. In fact, he was drafted #3 in the draft in the first round. He was absolutely all-

world as a college quarterback, playing for one of the best football programs in the country. He was considered to be an absolute blue-chip prospect.

He got into the pros and his career turned out to be rather mediocre. He lasted for a half a dozen years or so, but really never lived up to the promise that he seemed to hold as a college quarterback. The fans booed him and he moved from one franchise to another and ended up being a back-up quarterback, finally drifting out of the pros.

He said: Rich, the best thing that ever happened to me was for the first time in my life experiencing failure. Because before I experienced failure and got booed, I really had no sense of need for Christ at all. I had been raised in a Christian family. They took me to church. But, honestly, inside I just had no sense of need for God. Everything in my life was working and it was only when for the first time I experienced failure, when I couldn't pull it off for myself that I began to say, 'Do I need a Savior?' And I am telling you, that was the thing that pulled me out.

He could say, along with the apostle Paul: Whatever advantages I had, those things I am now counting as loss. They got in my way. They weren't bad. There is nothing wrong with being a pro football quarterback.

But anyone of you who has been around the highly successful, anyone of you who has done very well in school, or had professional training, you know that the higher you move on the scale, the more narrow the top of the pyramid is in terms of people who have a real strong relationship with Christ. The bottom of the pyramid is always very wide, but the higher up you go, I know this from personal experience, the higher up you go, the slimmer the top of the pyramid is.

In the law school class that I was a part of, I believe—I don't know this for sure—but I believe that I was the only evangelical Christian in my entire class my year out of

200 students. I had no one else in my class go to the law school Bible study. There was nobody else in my class that I was aware of that had any kind of outward witness. Because people get to a point when they think that they really don't need God. I mean, he is a nice add-on and you believe in God, you know, for morality and raising my kids, and putting a nice saying on \$20 bills "In God we trust," but the sense of need for God? Truly, until people meet failure in their marriage, relationships, work life and career, with their kids, with a breakup with a girlfriend or boyfriend, something—until folks really bump up against a sense of total inability, personally, there is very little room in most people's lives for God. Friends, losses aren't necessarily so horrible. Failure is not the worst thing you will face. The worst thing is succeeding all the time. One of the best things that ever happened to me personally was getting fired and being unable to find work after I experience a lot of success in school. Total inability to make things work. No more "can do."

And so Paul says: When I had that Damascus road experience, I realized that everything that was in the asset column in my life, needed to be pushed over to the liability column. Those things really blocked my senses and dulled my sense of need for God.

And then he goes on and says: But, I need to make a continual choice to view many of my assets as liabilities. Verse 8: What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for who's sake I have lost all things and I consider them rubbish that I might gain Christ.

Now, that statement that Paul makes: What is more, I consider everything a loss—that is a present tense verb. So in verse 7 Paul says by way of the tense of the verb: In the past, as a result of my experience, chose to count my advantages as disadvantages,

but now, in the present, I have to as an on-going process, day by day, remind myself and practice that many of my advantages are in fact disadvantages when it comes to relationship with Jesus who is of supreme value.

Listen to me, the moving of assets into the liability column in terms of your perception of where that takes you with Jesus, that isn't a once and for all choice that you made 20 years ago or 5 years ago or 1 year ago, or maybe you need to make today. The moving of your assets into the liability column so that you can value Christ above everything else, that is a day by day choice. It is a process that you never get done with. Today, you have to say: What is more, [today] I consider everything as a loss. My past decisions must be reinforced by daily choices. Today I must be poor in spirit. Today I must become a little child again before God, having nothing, needing everything. Because the drift in my life is always back toward being satisfied with something less than God.

The fight of my values is that the best value, Christ, gets replaced by lesser values that are good, but they are not Christ. So many good things in life push out the best thing. In my own life, the church and all the wonderful things that are going on in this church that I am so grateful for, the growth of the church and the fact that many, many people are making decisions to trust in Jesus for salvation through the church. And many of you are getting assistance and help in your family life and you are deciding against divorce and you deciding in favor of sexual purity. And many of you are deciding to commit your lives to Christ and all the things that you are doing in terms of ministries to the poor and ministries to prisoners. You are wanting to be influencers in your jobs. All of that, for me, often is a distraction and it gets in the way of me valuing Jesus and hearing Jesus' voice above everything else. As a pastor, I am continually having to fight

the drift of focus upon all that I see and not having that become a wall to what is supremely valuable, namely Jesus.

I woke up the other night in the middle of the night and I had such a sense of emptiness inside. And I said to the Lord: Lord, where have you been in my life recently? I miss you so much. I miss hearing your voice. You are not talking to me. I am not hearing you. I haven't valued you. I haven't valued your voice because there have been so many other wonderful things going on.

Do you understand that you can be satisfied with lesser things and allow your thirst to be filled with something less than the best wine? Today we must empty ourselves.

Let me give you a little shocking statement here to wake you up: G.K. Chesterton once said that the man who knocks on the door of the brothel is looking for God. That promiscuous person, you who are listening to me today who are sleeping around and are on the make, and you have a very promiscuous past, the truth is what is going on in terms of your sexual drivenness is that you are looking for God.

You say: Where do you get that from?

I get it from Jesus who looked into the eyes of the woman at the well who had a promiscuous past and he said to that woman: Woman, I know you are thirsty. But you are allowing your thirst to be met and satisfied by something else other than living water. Your need for connection is a real need. Your need for love is a real need, but you are not taking it far enough, all the way to letting yourself be opened up to having your need met by God and God alone.

Day by day we can either drink in the living water, that which is most satisfying, namely God, or we can meet our needs in lesser ways that keep us from really valuing

Christ, those little choices. I can meet my need for a bit of satisfaction by picking up the newspaper in the morning and perusing it and drinking my cup of coffee, or I can go deeper and follow my thirst all the way toward opening the word of God and spending time with the Lord and stirring myself to worship God and saying: God, I know you are the one that I really need. Not this.

The great advantages that I have in life can be put on the shelf for a little while so that I remember the ultimate advantage, namely knowing Christ, or those things can be blocks.

Well, Paul says: I make a conscious choice day by day to consider everything rubbish. The Greek word is “scubula”. It literally means: I consider everything else manure, dung, poopy, because it gets in the way of really valuing Jesus who is more precious than silver.

And he says: For Christ’s sake, I have not only considered suffering everything as a loss, but in fact, I have lost everything. In Paul’s life he had to give up all of the advantages, the job, the education. He had to give it all up to follow Christ. And Paul wants us to know that in giving up all of the advantages, he wasn’t being heroic. There is nothing in Christianity that blesses and encourages altruism which is selfless giving up, giving up your wealth—Oh, aren’t you wonderful? Oh, you give a lot of money, you are a great person.

Paul says: I am not a great person to have suffered the loss of everything. I gave up tin to find diamonds. I gave up paper bags to find gold. I gave up scubula, dung—stuff that got in my way of God.

Those of you who give yourself completely and passionately to Jesus, you are not losers. Because you are meeting your deepest needs. Christ comes and fills life and gives abundant life. How could you be a loser to come to Christ?

And so Paul closes this whole section in terms of the need for a change in values in saying: Ultimately, I am calling you to exercise faith. In choosing to value Christ above everything else, I am encouraging you to place your faith in Christ. Verse 9: I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Now Christians talk so much about faith and the need for faith that many people who are not yet Christians begin to think that people are saved on account of their faith. People say: Well, I hear what you are saying in terms of valuing Christ and how all of life's advantages can get in the way of really having a relationship with Christ. Maybe I would even like to become a Christian. But I am sorry, I don't have enough faith. I wish I had the faith. [Have you ever heard that?] I wish I had the faith that you do, but I just don't. And so, you know...

Well, somewhere along the line, that person who says: I don't have enough faith. I wish I had your faith, has gotten the idea [maybe from you] that people are saved and brought into relationship with Christ on account of an individual's faith. I want you to hear this real clearly and then I am going to explain it and end today, that people are not accepted by God on account of their faith.

People are not considered right with God on the basis of their faith. God does not look at an individual and say: Wow! Now she has the seven grams of faith that I am looking for in a person in order to say that they are acceptable with me. Whereas, you

over there, poor man, you don't have seven grams of faith, you only have one gram of faith. Therefore, you are not acceptable to me and you cannot be in relationship with me. You don't have enough faith cells. Some people have the faith cells to believe in me, but you don't. You don't have enough of whatever it takes to believe. You don't get it. Because you had a university education and you are intellectual and you a physician or whatever you are. You have been raised with a scientific background. You don't have the faith, therefore, you can't be acceptable to me.

If that, in any way, approximates what you have thought, then you have not thought about where faith comes in the Christian life in an appropriate or biblical way at all. Never say, and never think: I don't have enough faith. Faith is just an instrument. It is just the channel by which God's own righteousness becomes ours. We are not saved on account of faith. We are saved on account of Christ. What saves us is the Lord Jesus Christ. His perfect work of obedience. It is the death of Christ that saves us. It is the blood of Christ that saves us. It is the prayers of Christ before God's throne that saves us. It is his appearing before God. It is his pleading on our behalf before God. It is his blood that saves us. It is his perfect obedience to the law. His sinless death, his being nailed to the cross, his resurrection—it is Christ. His life and death and resurrection that saves, not your faith.

You say: But where does faith come in?

Well, where it comes in is that everyone has faith. It is not that some people have seven grams of faith and you were left, because of your wiring, to be unable to have faith. Everyone has faith. The only question for you as a human being is what you are going to put your faith in to secure for yourself a good life. You do have faith. You are relying on something to secure for yourself a good life. You may be currently relying on what Paul

says is simply confidence in the flesh. You may be relying, today, on your intelligence. You are relying on your ability to work hard. You are relying on your street-smarts, on your savvy. On your money. On your ability to make things work. On your winning personality. On your ability to maneuver. You are relying on yourself. You have faith, but your faith is in you.

The gospel call is to stop relying on yourself, putting faith in yourself, and direct your faith to Jesus. The issue is what are you putting your faith in? This whole text has told us: Don't value what you can do. That just gets in the way of what is supremely valuable. Value what Christ has done and value what Christ can do.

Choose to value Christ. Choose to rely on Christ.