

# Philippians 3:8-11

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/phil/phil-3/philippians-38-11/>

*Paul considers religious practices and custom meaningless compared to the far better value of serving Jesus Christ through the obedience of faith. Following the Jewish Law does not make anyone right in God's eyes; only faith in Christ does that. But life is more than simply being born into God's family. There is a future reward for believers who give up worldly concerns, who live out the servant mindset of Christ, obeying Him even if it means giving up everything, even dying for Him, just as He died for the world. Paul makes clear that this reward is worth giving up everything to gain.*

Paul chose to adopt the same attitude Jesus adopted when He came to earth (Philippians 2:5-10). Jesus gave up His position of comfort and privilege to become a servant to all, in obedience to His Father. Paul gave up his position as a religious authority to become a servant to Christ. His Jewish credentials were once a means of “gain”; the Jewish religious leaders had privilege and wealth (3:7). But because of the new perspective Paul has adopted, he no longer views these things as beneficial. They are actually a hindrance, getting in the way of what really matters—living in obedience, and coming to know God through a walk of faith.

Jesus learned obedience, even to death on the cross, through obeying His Father in all things and in all ways. Jesus trusted the benevolence of His Father, and obeyed Him fully, even unto death. As a result, He was exalted, and His name was lifted above every name. Paul desires to follow that same approach. All the credentials and earthly things that used to be “gain” to him, he has “counted as loss for the sake of Christ” (v. 7). Paul has now given up earthly privilege to become a servant to Christ. The “sake of Christ” is to follow the will of Christ.

Jesus expressed His will directly to Paul on the road to Damascus, and through Ananias, whom Jesus told “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.” (Acts 9). The *sake of Christ* included suffering for the name of Christ, even as Christ suffered. Paul embraced this completely, trusting in the benevolence of God, and that the reward for obedience would be more than worth the cost to him. Due to this perspective he had chosen, what he formerly considered *gain* he now *counted as loss*. The word translated *loss* can also mean “disadvantage.” He used to consider his earthly prestige as an asset but has now realized the things of the world were actually liabilities.

Paul had applied this not only to his prior religious privilege, but also to every other aspect of his life. He had decided that the loss of everything was worth fully obeying Christ. This is reflected in Paul's statement that *More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*. It is not just his religious credentials that Paul has decided to give no value in comparison to *knowing Christ Jesus*. Paul has actually decided to *count all things to be loss* in comparison to *knowing Jesus*. This is because *knowing Christ Jesus* has *surpassing value*.

Paul will describe what he means by *knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*. Implied in this statement is the *surpassing*, great benefit Paul sees in coming to know *Christ Jesus as Lord* during this life, which is the only time when we will walk by faith. In the next life believers see and know Jesus by sight. But as Paul notes in his letter to the Ephesians, the principalities and powers in the heavenly places are watching believers on earth who are walking by faith (the church) to understand the wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10; see also 1 Peter 1:12).

When we walk by faith in obedience to Jesus in this life, we gain a benefit that can only be obtained during this life. If we miss it, it will be gone forever, because we will no longer be able to walk by faith in the next life. Faith is believing unseen things as firmly as if they were seen (Hebrews 11:1). In the next life we will see. So we will not need faith. This indicates that there is an immense benefit to knowing God by faith that amazes heavenly beings.

The thing that has *surpassing value* is Paul coming to know *Christ as Lord* through the obedience of faith. The term *Lord* could also be translated “Master.” To come to know our Creator and Master through the obedience of faith has a value that surpasses any other thing that can be acquired in this life. All believers will one day be physically in the presence of Jesus, and know Him by sight. Here, Paul seems to be asserting that *knowing Christ* through the obedience of faith, in this life, has a *value* that surpasses all other available experiences.

That the angels are watching believers, intently studying us to understand the wisdom of God gives us a clue to the immense value of coming to know God by faith (Ephesians 3:10, 1 Peter 1:12). The angels are in the presence of God. But they do not have the opportunity to know God by faith. Faith is believing things we cannot see (Hebrews 11:1). In the next life, we will see as they see. It is only in this life we have the opportunity to know God by faith, the opportunity into which the angels long to look.

*Knowing Christ Jesus as Lord*, through the obedience of faith, has *surpassing value*. A form of the word translated “surpassing” is also found in 4:7, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” The *value* gained from *knowing Christ* our *Lord*, through the obedience of faith, has a *value* that surpasses any other thing of value we can gain in this life.

It is worth giving up everything to gain the benefit of *knowing Christ*. *Knowing Christ* is like the parable Jesus told of the man who found a field that contained a treasure, then went and sold all he had in order to buy the field, and gain the treasure (Matthew 13:44). The man’s perspective or mindset was that the treasure had a value that surpassed the value of all his possessions. So the man gave up all he had in order to gain something of *surpassing value*. Paul has the same mindset toward knowing Christ by faith. It is of greater value than everything else he has. This is why Paul considered “as loss” “whatever things” of this world that “were gain.”

This is why Paul is so committed to the obedience of Christ. He has adopted the attitude of Christ, who trusted His Father to exalt Him in due time. It is therefore Christ *for whom I have suffered the loss of all things*. Paul has lost much more than mere religious privilege. He has lost *all things*. Paul is in prison, even having lost his freedom, for the moment. He will ultimately

lose his life. But Paul has relinquished giving those things any value. He has made an intentional decision to *count* all earthly things *but rubbish so that I may gain Christ*.

Paul is clear in his writings that being justified in the sight of God is solely a matter of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:23-25; 4:1-4; 5:1,15). We are justified in the sight of God through no efforts of our own. When Paul says he desires to *gain Christ* he explains that he refers to his strenuous efforts to accomplish a number of things that he trusts will result in a great reward. We are accepted into God's family solely by faith. However, we are approved, and receive rewards, through walking in the obedience of faith. It appears that the greatest of rewards is to come to know Christ by faith, which has *surpassing value*. This knowledge of Christ, as Lord, comes through walking in the obedience of faith.

Paul told us in Chapter 2 to choose the same attitude Jesus chose, which was to set aside comfort and privilege in order to obey God, and in so doing to trust the Lord's benevolent intent toward us, that this was in our best interest. Jesus clearly did not obey His Father in order to be saved from sin and be justified in the sight of God; Jesus was without sin. Rather, Jesus obeyed His Father because He trusted that His Father's way was best. In doing so, Jesus gained the greatest of rewards. Paul has chosen to follow Jesus's example, and trust that God's way is best for him.

Here is the progression of Paul's reasoning, relating to the benefit he is striving for through giving up possession of all things that could provide earthly benefit. It is a somewhat complex string of reasoning, that might be broken down as follows:

- Paul desires to *be found in Him*. By being *found in Christ*, Paul clearly desires to be walking in the Spirit, in obedience to Jesus.
- While walking *in Christ*, Paul desires not to have *a righteousness of my own derived from the Law*. Paul is making a deliberate effort to set aside his former way of thinking, which was to consider his own religious observance of rules, *derived from the Law*, to become righteous before God. Paul makes an ongoing effort to set aside this mindset, and replace it with the mindset he described in Chapter 2—a mindset of obedience by faith, trusting God for his reward.
- To replace his former way of thinking that righteousness comes through religious acts and religious observance of rules, Paul now practices righteousness *which is through faith in Christ*. This will look like obedience even to death. This is the result of adopting the same attitude (“*phreneo*”) Jesus adopted (Philippians 2:5-10).
- Paul has replaced self-justifying righteousness of following religious rules and traditions with *the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith*. This is true *righteousness*, that comes through In the sense of being declared righteous in the sight of God (justified), that comes through faith alone (Genesis 15:6; Ephesians 2:8-9). In the sense of living righteously in this life (sanctified), that comes through the obedience of *faith*, trusting that obeying God's commands for us are for our best.
- Paul reasons that when he walks in the obedience of faith, trusting God's benevolence, no matter the cost, it has a result *that I may know Him*. The opportunity to *know* Jesus by faith comes only in this life. In the next life we will know Him by sight. The reward of knowing Christ by faith, through the obedience of faith, is worth giving up everything that is generally considered beneficial on earth.

- A part of knowing Jesus is to know *the power of His resurrection*. To walk in the *righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith* requires allowing the resurrection power of Jesus to flow through our lives. This is the only way we can really walk in the radical obedience of faith that Paul advocates. We can't do it through our own strength. We need to allow the *resurrection power* of Christ to flow through us.
- A part of living in the obedience of faith is to know *the fellowship of His sufferings*. Jesus suffered obedience to the point of death on a cross, and as a result was exalted by God (Philippians 2:5-10). There is a *fellowship* that Paul gains with Christ in suffering the *sufferings* of Christ. In Romans 8:17, Paul states that for those who suffer the sufferings of Christ, Christ will reward them by sharing His inheritance to reign. It is likely that the *fellowship* Paul has in mind includes this ultimate reward of *fellowship*. It is what Jesus referred to as entering into the joy of our Master in His parable of the talents (Matthew 25:23).
- To live in this way means *being conformed to His death*. Just as Jesus learned obedience, even to death on the cross, so Paul desires to do. This list overlaps with the attitude Paul admonished believers to have in the previous chapter (Philippians 2:5-10).

Paul concludes his progression of reasoning by saying he will do all this *in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead*. This statement is connected with the last step of the prior progression, which was *being conformed to His death*. There is in some way a connection between *being conformed to His death*, and his desire to *attain to the resurrection from the dead*.

Of course Jesus rose from the dead by the power of God. And resurrection from death is something promised to all believers, and does not come through striving. So Paul here seems to be speaking of something that he can *attain* through striving. This particular *resurrection from the dead* likely refers to a particular form of honor, that is connected with the obedience of death of a martyr for Christ.

That Paul refers to some type of reward is supported by the context. It is also supported by noting that the Greek word translated *resurrection* could be translated "out-resurrection." The word translated *resurrection* is the Greek word "exanástasis." This is its only occurrence in Scripture. The Greek word "anastasis" which is the root of "exanastasis," occurs 42 times, and is usually translated "resurrection." In the Greek language it meant to "be raised up." The Greeks were not prone to believe in resurrection from the dead, as evidenced by the reaction of Greek intellectuals to Paul's teaching on the subject in Acts 17:

"Now when [the Athenians] heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, 'We shall hear you again concerning this.'" (Acts 17:32)

The word translated "resurrection" in Acts 17:32 is the Greek word "anastasis." The fact that it was qualified by Paul by adding "from the dead" also indicates that "anastasis" meant "be raised up" and required a specific context to indicate "from the dead" when used with the general Greek population.

Adding the prefix “ex” to “anastasis” in Philippians 3:11 adds the concept of “out” to “rise up.” It could be rendered “out-resurrection.” Fitting this into the immediate context, it remains to be discerned what Paul has in mind in striving to *attain* to the “exanastasis” *from the dead* that fits with the idea that Paul is exerting extreme effort to *being conformed to Jesus’ death*, and to ascend to *the prize of the upward call of Christ Jesus*.

Even though in general Greek conversation the word “anastasis” would likely have seldom referred to “resurrection,” in the Bible it is the expected meaning. “Anastasis” occurs 42 times in the New Testament. There is only one occurrence where it does not mean “resurrection from the dead”:

“And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, ‘Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise (“anastasis”) of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed.’”  
(Luke 2:34)

In this verse from Luke, “anastasis” refers to someone ascending to prominence, and is contrasted with those who will fall from prominence. This seems to refer to the reality that all of humanity will be divided at the judgement based on their response to Jesus Christ.

If it were not for the qualifier Paul adds, “from the dead,” it would be likely that “exanastasis” would refer to the *upward call*, a positional “being raised up.” However, Paul adds *from the dead* to the *resurrection* (“exanastasis”) that he desires to *attain*.

Since “exanastasis” is something that Paul can *lay hold of*, to “attain” it seems to refer to something gained from exerting effort, which is why Paul says he will *press on*. To *press on* is to continue to exert strenuous effort, even when exhausted. Further, Paul says *not that I have already attained it or have become perfect*. It would seem more than odd for Paul to think he needed to explain he was not yet resurrected if he was referring to the resurrection of the dead received by all believers.

Further, he seems to connect “exanastasis” with being made “perfect” (verse 12) which refers to coming to a complete maturity in his faith. It is likely then that Paul is speaking of giving his life fully to faithfulness in being a witness to Christ, even unto death as a martyr for Christ.

It seems therefore that with the use of “exanastasis” of the dead, Paul is referring to being resurrected with some sort of special blessing or reward attached. Perhaps it is connected with the concept presented in Revelation of being an “overcomer.” It is clear in Revelation that some believers will be overcomers, and receive the great reward associated with overcoming, while others will not. All believers will be resurrected, but not all believers will receive the reward of being an overcomer.

It appears that rewards can be proportional, which is consistent with other passages, such as this verse from 2 John:

“Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.”  
(2 John 1:8)

This verse from 2 John indicates that rewards can be lost in part, since John exhorts his disciples to “receive a full reward” rather than a partial reward. What Paul seems to be stating is that he wants a full reward, the reward of having been a faithful witness, even unto death as a martyr for Christ. Just as Jesus laid down His life, Paul has chosen to lay down his own life as a martyr.

It is worth noting that the English word “martyr” is derived from Greek. In the book of Revelation, the word “martyria” occurs a number of times, and is most often translated “witness” or “testimony.” The Bible indicates that the key to being a “martyria” is to be a faithful witness, without fear of rejection, loss or death. Paul expects to do all of these.

The relationship between overcoming and being rewarded can be seen in Revelation 3:21, where Jesus exhorts those in the church of Laodicea to overcome, as “I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” Jesus clearly did not have to believe and be justified in the sight of God through faith. Jesus was sinless. But Jesus did overcome temptation, and rejection (Hebrews 4:15; 12:2). He overcame the agony of death (Luke 22:41-46). To overcome refers to learning obedience, even to death, just as Jesus learned, and was rewarded.

All believers will spend eternity in God’s presence, as His children. But only some will be rewarded to the fullest for their obedience. Paul wants to be one of those, and lay his life completely on the line to do so. He got a peek into heaven, which he was not allowed to speak of. But we might take from his enthusiasm to lay down his life as a martyr that what he saw made it clear to him that doing so would be more than worth the cost (2 Corinthians 12:1-4).

In his hope to *attain* the exanastasis/resurrection, Paul might be referring to a desire to be the sort of witness in Revelation who is said to “overcome.” An overcomer is a witness who is obedient to the point of not fearing death (of any sort, including loss or rejection). This might be connected with Paul’s statement in Chapter 1, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Perhaps Paul is saying “I won’t have *attained* to being the kind of faithful witness I seek to be, and gain the reward from that faithfulness, until I have learned obedience, even to death.”

It could be that in using “exanastasis” *of the dead* in place of “anastasis” *of the dead*, Paul has in mind a resurrection glory that is connected to living a life of obedience even to death. Paul will later refer to the great “goal of the prize of the upward call” (verse 14). This evokes the image of athletic achievement, as Paul described in 1 Corinthians 9. The “Olympic” athletes would be called up to the “bema” platform to receive recognition for achievement. Paul notes, however, that these Olympic rewards wither and fade, while the rewards of Christ last forever.

## **Biblical Text**

**<sup>8</sup>More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but**

**rubbish so that I may gain Christ,<sup>9</sup> and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,<sup>10</sup> that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;<sup>11</sup> in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.**