

emptied of our own righteousness. Paul, accordingly, acknowledges that nothing was so injurious to him as his own righteousness, inasmuch as he was by means of it shut out from Christ.¹

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Messiah,...

Paul now gives us a very long sentence which actually encompasses vv. 8–11. Not only does the length of the sentence indicate his fervency in expressing his point, but the sentence itself utilizes “bundled” phrases with vocabulary that fully emphasizes his point. And his point is obvious: nothing in this world compares to the glory, grandeur, and value of having obtained an eternal relationship with God through the work of His Son, Yeshua, brought to life by the Ruach bringing to life the gospel message in the hearts of those who are redeemed.

More than that... – The Greek ἀλλὰ μενοῦνγε καὶ is translated variously by the English versions: “Indeed” (ESV), “What is more” (NIV), “Yea, doubtless” (KJV). The obvious connection in these opening words of our verse is that to which Paul refers in the previous verses. There Paul points to those things which he counted as “gain,” namely, his “sterling Jewish pedigree,” as having no value when compared to his having been granted eternal salvation in Yeshua. But now Paul goes on, not only to confess that his Jewish lineage and religious advancements among the Jewish people, etc., pale in comparison to the value of the salvation in Yeshua, but that nothing whatsoever could even begin to compare in worth or personal value to the glory of “knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord.” This is because to know Yeshua far exceeds in value anything else in this world.

...I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord – In order to gain a greater understanding of Paul’s words here, we must ask ourselves what he means by the phrase “knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord.” To understand Paul’s meaning in this phrase, we must be reminded that in the Semitic world, the concept “to know someone” can surely include the meaning “to enter into a covenant relationship with that person.” We find this language, for instance, in the covenant God made with Abraham.

1 Calvin, *Philippians*, pp. 93-94.

The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have chosen [יָדָעַ, *yādaʿ*] him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.” (Gen 18:17–19)

Many of the English translations utilize the English word “chosen” to translate the Hebrew verb יָדָעַ (*yādaʿ*), “to know.” But it is clear that the wider context of this passage pictures the covenant God makes with Abraham (15:18), and this covenant relationship is summed up in the phrase “For I have known him.”

An example of this covenant use of the verb “to know” in the ancient Semitic world is a Hittite text recovered which uses the concept of “to know” to describe a covenant relationship between a “Great King” and his subjects.

And you, Hugganas, know only the Sun regarding lordship: also my son of whom I, the Sun, say, “This one everyone should know...”, you, Hugganas, know him! Moreover, those who are my sons, his brothers, or my brothers...know as brother and associate. Moreover, another lord...do not know. The Sun alone know! Moreover, any other do not know!¹

Note also that in the Tanach marriage is spoken of as a covenant.

This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. (Mal 2:13-14)

This helps to explain the use of the verb “to know” in Gen 4:1 when Moses writes: “Adam knew his wife Eve and she conceived...” Here Moses is using the word “know” (*yadaʿ*) in its covenant sense: Adam was faithful to the covenant of marriage into which he and Eve had

1 H. B. Huffman, “The Treaty Background of Hebrew יָדָעַ” *BASOR* 181 (1966), pp. 31–37.

entered, a covenant which meant he would have a spiritual and physical oneness with her and she with him, and they would have no such relationship with anyone else.

It is this background and use of the word “know” (γινώσκω, *ginōskō*) that enables us to more fully unpack Paul’s meaning when he describes his relationship with Yeshua as “knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord” (τῆς γνώσεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μου). He is describing far more than only “knowing about Yeshua” or “understanding the truth about Yeshua.” He is describing in biblical terms the eternal and surpassing value of having been united with Yeshua through the bonds of an eternal covenant which will never be severed, and having a true and established covenant relationship with Him which involves obedience, worship, and faithfulness in all aspects which these terms encompass.

When Paul states that he counts “all things to be loss,” he does not mean that all things are worthless or have no value whatsoever. He is using comparative language to express the fact that the value of having a living, active, and growing covenant relationship with Yeshua as his personal Savior and Lord, has the greatest personal value in regard to all that exists in this world. Moreover, because of this surpassing value, his worship and service to Yeshua has become his top priority. Thus Paul’s teaching is presented to us in this text as that which ought to be the mindset of all whom God has drawn to Himself and granted eternal life in Yeshua. It is a worthwhile practice to check our own progress in grace and to strengthen our resolve to give Yeshua “first place in everything.”

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. (Col 1:18)

The use of the word “loss” (ζημία, *zēmia*), which carries the sense of “to be at a disadvantage” or “to have less value,” is further explained by the word ὑπερέχω (*hyperexō*) “surpassing value,” which Paul uses again in 4:7.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Messiah Yeshua. (Phil 4:7)

Here Paul is teaching us that being assured of an unending and unbreakable “peace with God” exceeds our human ability to fully explain

or comprehend. For to fathom the love of God and His willingness to pay the infinite price for our redemption simply is beyond our finite abilities. Yet, even as Paul glories in the reality and truth of God's infinite love and mercy without requiring a comprehensive answer to the question "why?," so we who are in Yeshua likewise know God's love and grace to be real and actual, even if we are unable to give a full or exhaustive explanation. Here, then, is the very place where true saving faith establishes unbreakable assurance.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction [or "evidence"] of things not seen. (Heb 11:1)

...for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Messiah, – What does Paul mean when he states that he "suffered the loss of all things?" He is describing the initial confrontation that He experienced on the road to Damascus. For in the very glorious presence of Yeshua and being confronted with the eternal truth of His divine power and love, Paul recognized that the only way forward was first that of repentance. And what is the core reality of true repentance? It is first to admit that, in the sight of God, what one considers his or her own goodness is actually only pride and selfishness.

For Paul, his personal resumé of accomplishments was quite impressive from the viewpoint of fallen humanity, but in God's sight it was "rubbish." This is the gift of God to those He redeems, that is, to enable them to recognize this and to willingly "count as rubbish" what previously was the source of self-centered pride. In fact, the word translated by the NASB as "rubbish" (σκύβαλα, *skubala*) is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures and never in the Lxx of the canonical books. It is found once in the Apocryphal book of Sirach (27:4). It means "garbage," "refuse," and even "excrement," "manure."¹ As Fee notes:

...it is hard to imagine a more pejorative epithet than this one now hurled at what the Judaizers would promote as advantages. Paul sees them strictly as disadvantages, as total loss, indeed as "foul-smelling street garbage" fit only for "dogs."²

This is because the salvation that God has made through the gift of His

1 BDAG, "σκύβαλλον," p. 932.

2 Fee, *Philippians* in NICNT, p. 319.

Son, Yeshua, and the divine working of His Ruach, is a gift which can only be received by faith as a pure and unfettered gift of His grace. And this is an important truth to emphasize in all religious circles, including what might be generally referred to as the “Messianic movement.” Surely we are grateful for the love of God in choosing Israel to be His chosen nation, and raising up prophets and apostles within Israel who were “carried along” by the Ruach to give mankind the Scriptures. But seeking to gain God’s saving grace through one’s own ethnic status, or by adopting practices and culture of the Jewish people, is to think that one could earn God’s favor. But believing that one can add something to God’s grace actually denies the very meaning of grace as applied to God’s work of salvation. As Fee notes:

For Paul it is a theological truism that grace and self-confidence are in radical antithesis; grace plus anything cancels out grace.¹

...so that I may gain Messiah, – Taken out of the immediate context, this phrase sounds as though Paul had done something on his own by which he was “awarded” the love and salvation procured by Yeshua. But the context clearly speaks against such an interpretation and does so with powerful words. For Paul’s own works, which likewise describe the works of any one within the fallen race of humanity, have been described as “refuse” and therefore unable to attract, much less acquire, God’s saving favor. Rather, what Paul is emphasizing here is that one cannot come under the shelter of God’s eternal love and favor until he or she considers and fully admits that they have no ability to please God apart from His gracious and sovereign work. For it is by His work that they admit their utter inability to please Him and are “born anew” by the gift of faith, receiving the eternal salvation God has purchased for them through His Son, Yeshua. Then, having been made new in Him, they are enabled to walk in righteousness through the power of the Ruach and to become trophies of God’s love, grace, and omnipotence.

This is what Paul means by “gaining Messiah.” This becomes a reality only when we “die to self,” confess that in and of ourselves we have no ability to please Him nor to “win His favor,” and receive by faith the gift of salvation won for us by Yeshua Himself.

1 Fee, *Philippians* in *NICNT*, p. 320.

To know Christ and to gain Christ are two ways of expressing the same ambition. If Christ is the one “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3), to know him means to have access to those treasures; but to know him for his own sake is what matters to Paul most of all.¹

9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Messiah, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

Paul now elaborates what he means in the former clause by the expression “that I may gain Messiah.” He utilizes the passive voice of the verb “to find” (εὐρίσκω, *euriskō*) thus emphasizing that to be “in Him” is not something that one is able to bring about himself, but that ultimately the Father fully reckons the believer in Yeshua to be “in Him,” that is counted as righteous as Yeshua Himself is righteous. Here, once again, Paul is emphasizing that salvation is entirely the work of God’s grace which is applied to the repentant sinner by faith, not by earning God’s favor. Thus we might understand Paul’s words “to be found” to mean: “to be seen, discovered, or proved to be.”²

Thus Paul paints a beautiful picture for everyone who, by faith in Yeshua, is reckoned by the Father as united with Yeshua and thus participating in His righteousness. For those who are “in Him” are declared by the Father as having the very righteousness of Yeshua Himself imputed to them.

Reach my blest Saviour first; Take Him from God’s esteem;
Prove Jesus bears one spot of sin; Then tell me I’m unclean!³

1 F. F. Bruce, *Philippians in UTB Commentary*, p. 113.

2 Marvin Vincent, *Philippians in ICC* (T & T Clark, 1897), p. 101.

3 From the hymn “Christ’s Grave is Vacant Now,” (W. Noel Tomkins)