

# THE GARBAGE HEAP OF SALVATION BY WORKS

## Philippians 3:4-8

### INTRODUCTION

#### READ Phil 3:1-3

Review of what God has laid before us in first 3 verses:

Against the Judaizers, the False Circumcision

→ the Dogs, the Evil-workers, the Mutilators

3 Distinguishing Evidences of the True Circumcision;

→ Spirit-Driven Worship, Christ-Directed Praise,  
Self-Renounced Confidence

Contrast with v. 3

→ there is a comma at the end of v. 3, not a period.

#### READ Phil 3:4-7

This takes us into the very heart of the sinner in conversion.

**“<sup>4</sup>although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:”**

Paul had confidence in his own judgments. He was his own reference point for what he believed and how he lived;

**“I myself”** – this is an emphatic personal pronoun

**“the flesh”** – **σάρξ** – sometimes used to describe the muscular part that covers the bones, sometimes the physical body as a whole, sometimes the earthly sphere of existence, sometimes used to distinguish the corruptible from the incorruptible and sometimes used to describe the sinful power toward sin, life apart from God and controlled by sin; the opposite is **πνεῦμα** (*spirit*)

Paul can stand toe to toe with anyone when it comes to religious Background and Efforts. He was the poster boy of the very arguments the Judaizers presented.

What Paul does here is brilliant and beautiful:  
Paul battles the enemies of the Gospel on their own ground. He takes their weapons from them. And he kills them with those same weapons.

Paul's takes out a balance sheet – he uses accounting terms:  
→ Assets he used to list in his Spiritual Profits column  
He is saying that salvation is NOT by: birth, culture, training, efforts

**2 Cor 11:22** – “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.”

First four – Inherited privileges, birth and upbringing

Last 3 – Personal achievements, effort

- things he used to count in his Profit Column, he now places in the Loss Column - figuratively speaking

Loss for Christ            4-7

Gain in Christ            8-11

7 Clauses/Phrases in vv. 5, 6

**Proposition:** 7 Advantages in Paul's Former “Profit Column”  
That He Now Considers Garbage

**So that: v. 8** – “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 in order that I may gain Christ,”

“**rubbish**” – *hapax* - translated as garbage! manure, dung!

- ancient medical texts use this word to refer to human excrement

- it would be hard to come up with a more descriptive condemnation of works-based salvation than this word

All human efforts to earn (deserve) salvation are nothing but garbage, dung.

**First Advantage** in Paul's former "Profit Column" he now considers garbage:

## **I. Ritual**

Point – **Eccl 3:11** – “[God] has set eternity in their heart”  
“religion” F/ Latin *religare* (to bind) *religio* (obligation, bond)

Majority of humanity is trusting in religious ritual to gain favor with God, to get to heaven, to reach nirvana – whatever that might be for them.

The rub → some of which even commanded by God.

Proof – **v. 5a “circumcised the eighth day”** – Gen 17:12-13

Paul's point is not just that he obeyed the sign of Abrahamic Covenant, but he is native-born. → literally – I'm an “eighth day” man. I'm not a Gentile convert who was circumcised later in life. My parents obeyed the command of God when I was a baby.

Now, it is interesting Paul leads with this point. From a purely logical standpoint, this should come third point, after Israel and Benjamin.

→ because of the context – The “false circumcision” Judaizers, the Mutilators

NOTE! (And this will be true for all 7 of these advantages)

Paul is NOT condemning circumcision in and of itself!

**Acts 16:3** – “Paul wanted this man [Timothy] to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who

were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.”

Paul circumcised Timothy not to add to Timothy’s salvation, not to give him an extra measure or means of grace, not so that Timothy would be saved. He is circumcising this man who is already saved so that Timothy can evangelize the Jews.

Paul IS condemning the heretical teaching that circumcision, or any ritual, will save you. → **Garbage!**

**Illustration** – Roman Catholic complicated system of 7 **Sacraments:**

baptism, confirmation, eucharist (mass), indulgences, last rights, marriage, and holy order (priests, nuns)

**Application** – Beloved, there are millions of circumcised people in hell. Millions of baptized people in hell. There are millions of people who prayed a sinner’s prayer or walked an altar, but are lost men and women on their way to hell.

→ Do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? If you don’t, God says your religious rituals are garbage.

They will not save you. They will condemn you.

**Second Advantage** in Paul’s former “Profit Column” he now considers garbage...

**II. Race** - remember there is only one race - the human race - but I needed an “r” word for alliteration :)

Point – Your birth, your ethnicity will not/cannot save you.

Proof – v. 5b “**of the nation of Israel**”

Paul says I am a member of God’s chosen nation!

I’m not a convert to Israel. I’m not a former Gentile who’s now a worshiper of the God of Israel.

**Zech 2:8** – “For thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘After glory He has sent me against the nations which plunder you [Israel], for he who touches you, touches the apple of His eye.’”

Paul is a pureblood. He is not of mixed origin. He can trace his line back to the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Israel.  
“I am not an Ishmaelite or an Edomite.”

Paul’s point is that he is taking the weapons of the Judaizers and he is fighting them with their own weapons.

### **Illustration– John 8:39-44**

**Application** – In the same way, you are not saved because you were born a Jew. You are not saved because you were born into a Christian, churchgoing family.

When it comes to trusting your eternity to the family/nation into which you were born ... Paul says → **Garbage!**

He doesn’t say to take this lightly. He says throw it from you with as much force as possible.

**Third Advantage** in Paul’s former “Profit Column” he now considers Garbage...as he adds to the garbage heap...

### **III. Rank**

Point – Class (Social Standing), Reputable Descent

Proof – v. 5c “**of the tribe of Benjamin**” –

Benjamin was an elite tribe of Israel. He was the last of the twelve sons of Jacob and the younger of two sons born to Rachel, Jacob’s favorite wife, his beloved wife.

Benjamin was the only one of the sons of Jacob born in the Promised Land (Gen 35:9-18).

The Tribe of Benjamin was a Military Force for Israel

→ **Jgs 20:15-16** –“from the cities on that day the sons of Benjamin were numbered, 26,000 men who draw the sword ... 700 choice men ...each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.”

**1 Chron 8:40** – “the sons of Ulam were mighty men of valor, archers ... All these *were* of the sons of Benjamin.”

When they went to find a king, to what tribe did they go? Benjamin. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Sam 9).

When God divided and allocated the Promised Land, the section He gave to Benjamin included the city of Jerusalem.

The nation of Israel was split in two after the reign of Solomon in 931 B.C.. It was divided into a Northern and a Southern kingdom. Benjamin was loyal to the Davidic dynasty and stayed with Judah to form the legitimate Southern kingdom.

Remember in the book of Esther when God used a man named Mordecai to save the entire nation of Israel from being massacred. Mordecai was from the tribe of Benjamin. Also, Gentiles could be “grafted” into the nation of Israel. But neither Gentiles, nor other tribes, could be “grafted” into the esteemed tribe of Benjamin.

→ Perhaps more to the point – at the time of Paul writing Philippians, most of the Jews didn’t know from what tribe they came. Most of the records had been lost in the Babylonian captivity and there had been a huge amount of intermarriage among the tribes which had blurred the tribal lines.

But Paul’s family stayed pure Benjamites. He says, “I am an Israelite in the purest truest sense. I even know my tribe.”

**Fourth Advantage** in Paul’s former “Profit Column” he now considers Garbage...

#### **IV. Rearing**

Point – raising, family religious tradition, culture

## Proof – v. 5d “a Hebrew of Hebrews” –

Paul was raised in the pagan city and Greek culture of Tarsus on the northeastern part of the Mediterranean Sea.

He was raised in Gentile territory under Greek culture and Roman rule.

But Paul says, I am not a Hellenized Jew. I was not polluted by the Greek culture. I am a “Hebrew child of Hebrew parents.” My parents and I have maintained the tradition.

→ Purity of lineage, purity of learning, purity of language.

For Paul, Hebrew was the language of home and heart. He did not have to learn it in the synagogue. He learned it at home. Paul was immersed in the language and culture and heritage of his people, the elect nations of God.

... BUT he understood that people could love the language, the culture and the heritage ... and still hate the God who gave the language, the culture and the heritage.

**Application** – Being raised in a good family, with solid religious tradition, even with God-honoring culture is a blessing! BUT ... if you are trusting this for your salvation → **Garbage!**

**Fifth Advantage** in Paul’s former “Profit Column” he now considers Garbage...

## **V. Religion**

Point – Salvation by works (human works)

## Proof – v.5e “as to the Law, Pharisee;”

The historian Josephus said the Pharisees were, “a body of Jews with a reputation of excelling the rest of the nation in their observance of religion.”

The Pharisees considered themselves the custodians of the true faith, elitists, the super-believers.

This was the highest level of religious achievement in Judaism.

They had developed a commentary on the Pentateuch with 603 commandments spelling out what governed your life from sun-up to sun-down. Everything you did and every relationship.

Now, not all of the Pharisees were snakes and vipers and fools and hypocrites and blind leaders and robbers and proud fakers. Some of them were serious minded.

Paul pointing to himself:

**Act 23:6** – “I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees”

**Act 26:4-5** – “all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my *own* nation and at Jerusalem; <sup>5</sup>since they have known about me for a long time previously, if they are willing to testify, that I lived *as* a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.”

**Illustration** – Turn to: **Matt 23:1-5**

**Application** → Not Paul! He was not like the Pharisees who say things, but do not do them. He was not like those who tie up heavy loads and lay them on men's shoulders, but are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. NO! Saul of Tarsus was many things. But one thing he was not → he was not a hypocrite.

Paul did what he said and he moved heavier loads of works salvation than anyone. BUT he now considers it **GARBAGE!**

You were circumcised? Hey, so was I.  
You are Jewish by birth? Hey, so am I.

In fact, I am of born of the tribe Benjamin/son of the beloved wife of Jacob, Rachel, the only son born in the Promised Land

→ the one small tribe that remained faithful to the throne of David at the division of the kingdom in 931 B.C., Benjamin.

I am a purebred Hebrew and I belong to the most “orthodox” party of the Jews, the Pharisees, and ... I studied under Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3)

**Sixth Advantage** in Paul’s former “Profit Column” he now considers Garbage...

## **VI. Radicalism**

Point – zeal/sincerity.

- Paul is not a half-hearted “religious man”

Proof – “<sup>6a</sup>as to zeal, a persecutor of the church”

“**zeal**” – literally means same – ‘to boil or bubble up’ – same word is translated – “**jealousy**” (Gal 5:20; James 3:14, 16)

There is good “**zeal**” and there is bad “**zeal**.”

Good zeal:

Old Testament: **Phinehas** is commended for his “**zeal**” – Num 25:11-13

New Testament: John 2:17 – **Jesus** is consumed with “**zeal**”

Bad zeal:

Paul says, “let me tell you how zealous I was: I killed Christians.” – “**a persecutor of the church**”

**Illustration** – Many people say, “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere about it.”

- make no mistake - God detests hypocrisy
- however, just because someone is sincerely wrong, they are still wrong → God says Garbage!

**Application** – By the way, isn’t it interesting that God chose this man, this 8<sup>th</sup> day, Israelite/Benjamite, Hebrew of Hebrews, Pharisee to be the Apostle to the Gentiles?

There are those who promote the ridiculous idea the best way to reach people is from someone like them. The thought is that if you want to reach a drunkard, you need a recovered drunkard. If you want to reach the rich, how about a rich Christian.

One example that espouses this wrong idea:

Rick Warren in “The Purpose Driven Church”

*“There are some types of people your church will never reach, because they require a completely different style of ministry than you can provide.”*

*“Explosive growth only occurs when the type of people in the community match the type of people that are already in the church and they both match the type of person the pastor is.”*

**Seventh Advantage** in Paul’s former “Profit Column” he now considers Garbage...

## **VII. Reputation**

Point – esteem

Proof – “<sup>6b</sup>as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.”

This verse has caused confusion among some. Is Paul saying that he was perfect and sinless? NO!

→ straightforward understanding comes from the word ...

“**blameless**” – faultless, without guilt; having a life so that an accusation that flies will not stick. Gen 17:1; Esth 8:12;

In the Old Testament, this word was used multiple times in Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; 4:17; 9:20; 11:4; 12:4; 15:14; 22:3, 19; 33:9

**Luke 1:6** – “[Zacharias and Elizabeth] were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.” - this word is used in the positive sense

**Phil 2: 13-15** - “for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.<sup>14</sup> Do all things without grumbling or disputing; <sup>15</sup> so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,”

So what does it mean here in **Phil 3:6**?

Context here → when judged by men, according to man’s standards! – the understanding of the Law *en vogue* at the time

Paul tirelessly kept all the rules and regulations.

- He was faultless in human eyes.
- He had gone through the ceremonies; he had racial purity, patriotism, fluency in the old language, strictness and discipline, zeal, and he was as straight as an arrow.

These are why Paul had such confidence in himself (v.4).

Prior to my salvation, I was a legalist’s poster boy.

**BUT!!** These were the way to hell not heaven.

Paul came to know that his great need wasn’t a righteousness acceptable to his cronies but to the Holy One of Israel.

And that righteousness is a righteousness that, as Paul will explain in beautiful language in subsequent verses, only comes through faith alone in Christ alone.

**Illustration** – Picture a boat tied with a 10-link chain to a dock upstream from Niagara Falls. If one link is broken or if all ten links are broken – it doesn’t matter. The effect is the same. The boat will plunge over the falls to certain destruction.

**Application** – In the same way, some people break all the links of the Word of God and we call them criminals and murderers. Others gently pry open one and the tendency is that we overlook it ... because they are just like us.

Whether one is a criminal or a saint, from a human perspective of sin, what God says is that Christ alone is the one who met all the requirements of the law and our salvation comes from faith alone in Christ alone.

## **CONCLUSION**