

7, 8a. In the two preceding verses Paul has enumerated his superior advantages as a genuine Israelite, of noble birth, orthodox in his belief, and scrupulous in his conduct. By means of these advantages the apostle, in his pre-conversion period, had been “bleeding to climb to God.” But had it not been a case of “Gaining a foothold bit by bit Then slipping back and losing it”?

Worse even, for never at all had there been any *real* progress, no matter how hard he, Paul the Pharisee, had labored to establish his own righteousness. But on the way to Damascus to persecute Christians the great event occurred which changed his entire life. Christ, as it were, came down the stairs to him (read the gripping account in Acts 9:1–31; 22:1–21; 26:1–23). In a moment Paul saw himself as he really was, a deluded, self-righteous, damnable sinner. Then and there he embraced the One whom until now he had been persecuting with might and main. He became “a new creature.” In his mind and heart he experienced a complete turn-about, a sudden and dramatic reversal of all values. The cause which with every means at his disposal and with all the zeal of heart and will he had been trying to wipe out now became very dear to him. And also, those things which to *Paul, the Pharisee*, had seemed very precious *became* at this moment — and ever after *remained* — useless to *Paul, the sinner, saved by grace*; and not merely *useless* but definitely *harmful*. Writes Paul, Nevertheless, such things as once were gains to me these have I counted loss. Not that any of these things which he enumerated in verses 5 and 6, and other things like them, were bad in themselves. Quite the contrary. To receive the sign of the covenant is not bad in itself. It is, in fact, a blessing. And was it not a blessing to belong to that people to which the oracles of God had been entrusted? Orthodoxy, too, is in itself a good thing. So is zeal, and so certainly also is irreproachable conduct. Paul himself elsewhere informs us that he considers such things as these to be blessings (Rom. 3:1, 2; 9:1–5; cf. 11:1). They are blessings because they can be of inestimable value if properly used, namely, as a preparation for the reception of the gospel. But when these same privileges begin to be viewed as a basis for self-satisfaction and self-glorification, when they are regarded as a ticket to heaven, they are changed into their opposites. All these separate *gains* become *one huge loss*. This is Paul’s deliberate, considered judgment. He considered the gains, and counted ¹³⁹ them loss. And in that judgment he persisted, as is implied in the tense of the Greek verb. On his balance-sheet those things which once were included, one by one, in the column of *assets* have now been transferred to the column of *liabilities*, and have been entered as *one gigantic liability*. Note that the plusses have not become a zero (0), but have become even less than zero, that is, one colossal MINUS (-). “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?” (Matt. 16:26; cf. Mark 8:36).

The word *loss* which Paul uses here in verses 7 and 8, and nowhere else in his epistles, occurs in only one other New Testament chapter, Acts 27 (verses 10 and 21), in the story of The Voyage Dangerous. And it is exactly that same chapter which also indicates how *gain* may become *loss*. The cargo on that ship bound for Italy represented potential *gain* for the merchants, for the owner of the ship, and for hungry people. Yet, had not this wheat been thrown into the sea (Acts 27:38), *loss*, not only of the ship but even of all those on board, might well have been the result. Thus also, the advantage of being born in a Christian home and having received a wonderful Christian home-training, becomes a disadvantage when it is viewed as a basis upon which to build one’s hope for eternity. The same holds with respect to money, the charming look, a college education, physical strength, etc. All such helps may become hindrances. The stepping-stones will be turned into stumbling blocks, if wrongly used.

When the question is asked, “Why was it that, in Paul’s considered judgment, these gains had become a loss?” the answer is for Christ, that is, for the sake of Christ; for, had Paul been unwilling to renounce his former estimate of these privileges and achievements, they would have deprived him of Christ, the one real gain (see verse 8).

Paul continues, in a sentence that is almost untranslatable, ¹⁴⁰ Yes, what is more, I certainly do count all things to be sheer loss because of the all-surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

In verse 8 Paul strengthens his previous statement, and this in two ways. First, he underscores what was implied in the preceding, namely, that what he counted loss at the moment of his conversion he is still counting to be loss. It is as if he were saying, "On this subject no Judaizer will ever be able to change my mind." Secondly, he now affirms that he considers not only the things mentioned in verses 5 and 6 to be a liability, a detriment, but also all other things that could stand in the way of fully accepting Christ and his righteousness...

8b, 9a. "I am still counting them refuse," says Paul, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him. ¹⁴⁵ Paul wishes to make Christ more and more fully his own. As long as one keeps clinging, even in the slightest degree, to his own righteousness, he cannot fully enjoy Christ's. The two simply do not go together. The one must be fully given up before the other can be fully appropriated. It is Paul's great aim that in the observation of all his fellow-believers he may be *found* to be completely *in him*, that is, in union with Christ. For the meaning of "in Christ" see also on Phil. 1:1. Here in Phil. 3 this "in him" relationship is described as to its forensic side in verse 9, and as to its practical side in verse 10. The "in him" relationship means that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the sinner, so that it is reckoned as his own. This implies redemption from the claims of Satan (Rom. 8:31, 33), reconciliation with God (2 Cor. 5:18-21), forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7), hence, the state of being in conformity with the law of God (Rom. 8:1-4).

Now when Paul states that he is counting everything to be refuse in order that he may gain Christ and may be found in him, this sacrifice with the purpose of capturing the one, real prize must not be interpreted in a selfish, mercenary sense. It must, of course, be interpreted in the light of such passages as Rom. 11:36 and 1 Cor. 10:31. It is the glory of God that Paul has in mind, not just his own selfish benefit. To be sure, he is not forgetting himself. His is, in fact, seeking to promote his own welfare, which is altogether right and proper. But this ideal is never separated from the highest possible objective. The two go together. ... the apostle is more like a sea-captain who in time of war, *for patriotic reasons* jettisons his cargo, thereby lightening his ship so that it will have the speed needed to overtake and capture the enemy's vessel that contains a far more precious treasure. Even better, he is like a young man, heir to a going concern, who cheerfully gives up this inheritance in order that he may prepare himself for the ideal of his life: that of *rendering service to the Lord* in the work of the ministry, whether at home or abroad. Cf. Mark 10:21.¹

¹William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Philippians*, [Hendriksen-Kistemaker New Testament Commentary](#). Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1962), 160-165.

It has become common in recent biblical scholarship, when referring to Paul's Damascus experience, to emphasize its character as a call (cf. Gal. 1:15) and to tone down the element of conversion (e.g., Koester 1982: 2.100). It is true of course that Paul understood his experience as a divine calling; and it is also true that he did not view his new commitment as an abandonment of the God of Israel. But Phil. 3:7–8 leaves no doubt that Paul's submission to Christ constituted a conversion in its deepest sense. These verses repeatedly set a negative evaluation of his prior way of life against a positive description of his new experience:

The Old Life	The New Life
these I have reckoned a loss	for Christ
I reckon all things loss	for the value of knowing Christ
I have lost all things	for whom [i.e., for Christ]
I reckon them dung	that I may gain Christ

If we focus on the items under the left column, we notice a significant progression of thought; clearly, Paul expresses with increasing intensity his sense of dissatisfaction with those things that had previously been most important to him. For example, the direct object in verse 7, ἅτινα (*hatina*, whatever things; reinforced with ταῦτα, *tauta*, these things), becomes πάντα (*panta*, all things) in verse 8. We need not absolutize the meaning of *panta* to appreciate its full force. The thrust of the word is clearly established by the context: everything on which Paul might place his fleshly confidence. Because verse 8 begins with a very emphatic combination of five particles,³ it is clear that Paul intends to reiterate his point in the most forceful terms possible.

One can also detect a note of progression in the shift from the perfect tense ἤγημαι (*hēgēmai*, I have considered, v. 7) to the present ἡγοῦμαι (*hēgoumai*, I consider; used twice in v. 8). To be sure, the perfect tense itself is hardly devoid of reference to the present (cf. BDF §§340–42),⁴ but given the clear contrast between verses 7 and 8, Paul appears to be exploiting the distinction: “Don’t think I regret my decision—even now I continue to regard every one of those virtues as nothing.” Schenk (1984: 263) notes the lexical connection with 2:3 and with the various occurrences of *phroneō*; Paul is speaking about a deep-seated resolution and frame of mind.

In addition, we have the most striking progression of all in the change from the noun ζημία (*zēmia*, loss, vv. 7, 8a) to the verb ζημιόω (*zēmioō*, [passive] to suffer damage, v. 8b) and then to the potent noun σκύβαλα (*skybala*, refuse, waste, v. 8c). Most commentators point out, rightly, that the term *zēmia* itself is rather emphatic; apparently drawing on commercial terminology (but see the second additional note on 3:7), Paul tells us that he now regards his previous “assets” (κέρδη, *kerdē*) not merely as without worth but as positively damaging, as spiritual “liabilities.” “In the process of reevaluation [Paul] perceived with horror that the things he had hitherto viewed as benefiting him had in reality been working to destroy him because they were blinding him to his need for the real righteousness which God required” (Hawthorne).

And yet the apostle goes even further: what he once regarded highly he now finds revolting. There is no need to downplay the meaning of *skybala* with such equivalents as “rubbish” (NASB, NIV); while such a meaning is attested (cf. Sir. 27:4—the Greek term could be used of various kinds of filth), a specific reference to *excrement* is not uncommon and the KJV rendering “dung” is both appropriate and probable.⁵ One must be careful, however, not to conclude that Paul regarded Jewishness in itself as revolting; his sense of identity with his people, as well as passages like Rom. 3:1–2 and 9:1–5, make clear that he continued to appreciate the great value of his heritage.

It was, therefore, not the heritage as such that he revolted against, but the viewing of that heritage as a human right or achievement, thus obscuring one's need for full dependence on God's grace. It is difficult not to see here an allusion to Isa. 64:6: “all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags.” Moreover, there is some evidence that the ancients understood *skybalon* as deriving from *to tois kysi ballomenon*, “that which is thrown to the dogs” (see Lightfoot). Since popular etymologies play a

significant role in the use of language (see Silva 1994: 50), and because Paul had earlier (v. 2) referred to his opponents as “dogs,” we may have here a veiled reference to the Judaizers.

If we now refer back to the chart represented above and focus on the right column, we notice a comparable progression of thought, especially in the three phrases where the name of Christ is expressly mentioned. The first one (v. 7) is simply διὰ τὸν Χριστόν (*dia ton Christon*, for the sake of Christ), but in verse 8 it is expanded to “for the sake of the incomparable value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”⁶ The significance of this idea for Pauline theology will be discussed in connection with verse 10. One should note here, nevertheless, the forcefulness of Paul’s language. Lightfoot points out a similar expression used by Paul in 2 Cor. 3:10 where the apostle speaks of the glory of the old covenant as being no glory at all in comparison with the ministry of righteousness. Knowing Christ overshadows anything else that might have been considered a gain. Paul had no regrets about having forsaken the source of his earlier pride, for nothing could compare with the knowledge of his Lord.

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²Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament](#). 2d; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 156-159.

3:7-8 The first side of the comparison is Paul's terminology for his former life. Three times he described it, and each is progressively more vivid. First, he considered his gains as loss. The perfect tense form of "considered" (*hēgemai*) suggests a completed evaluation with present effects.²⁴ He came to realize that they were loss. Second, he continued to affirm that decision. In 3:8 the present tense of "consider" joins with the object "loss." Paul meant that this was a proper appraisal and a good decision. The point receives further emphasis by the repetition of the word "loss" in a verbal form: "I have lost all things." Third, in 3:8 Paul expressed his conviction more firmly with the verb "consider" and the object "rubbish" (*skybala*).²⁵ There is increasing intensity, as though the mere thought of that decision brought a renewed appraisal that his former life was useless compared to what really mattered.

Paul reflected on the Damascus road experience (Acts 9:1ff.). At that time he saw the foolishness of his past life and embraced a new way. His negative appraisal, therefore, expressed an important component of salvation. No one can choose Christ who does not reach a similarly negative conclusion about his own efforts.

The other side of the contrast explains why Paul considered his heredity and achievements so useless. They did not bring him to Christ. Three times Paul expressed that the goal was Christ. First, he said it was "for the sake of Christ" (3:7). This is the idea of exchange in seed form. Second, he said it was for the sake of "the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (3:8). The advance in this statement is that a knowledge of Jesus excelled what Paul had before. The word "surpassing" suggests something of more excellence than that to which it is compared.²⁶ Therefore, knowing Christ was better than the combined value of his former life. Some interpret this knowledge in a Gnostic context and claim that Paul spoke of a general religious knowledge. This is a Jewish context, however, and the knowledge of which he spoke is probably to be understood in light of the Old Testament "knowledge of God," now applied to Christ. Seen this way, "knowledge" means "a personal response of faith and obedience to God's self-revelation."²⁷ Third, Paul said he counted all things as loss "that I might gain Christ" (3:8). Here Paul clearly developed the idea of exchange. It was impossible to hold on to the former values and still have Christ. It was one or the other, and Christ exceeded anything and everything else. The three statements express repentance regarding Paul's former attitudes about salvation. He turned away from the past to gain Christ.²⁸

Aspiration of the New Life (3:9-11). Paul explained what was better. The structure of the text is somewhat confusing. First, two verbs are parallel, but one explains the other. The parallels are: "that I may gain Christ" (v. 8) and "be found in him" (v. 9). Second, a parenthesis explains what that means—it is having a Christian righteousness, not a legal one. Third, the idea is restated: "that I may know him" (v. 10, KJV). The NIV makes this a new sentence, "I want to know Christ." Finally, the ultimate concern is expressed in v. 11, "to attain to the resurrection from the dead." The section, therefore, has three movements, one for each verse division.³

³Richard R. Melick Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery, vol. 32 of [The New American Commentary](#). Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 131-133.

3:7-9. Any of those who troubled the saints at Philippi would have loved to have been able to list to his credit those things Paul did. On the human side these were reasons to have religious self-confidence. But all those things enumerated in verses 5-6 the apostle considered loss for the sake of Christ (v. 7).

Consider means to “think through or reflect on.” After reflection he considered them loss. This he did at a point in time in the past and that decision was still in effect when he wrote, as connoted by the use of the Greek perfect tense. Doubtless Paul considered his life-transforming conversion on the Damascus Road as the time when he switched from confidence in the flesh to confidence in Christ alone.

It would be hard to find a more forceful refutation of human effort to please God than what Paul presented here (v. 8). Four Greek particles (ἀλλὰ μενοῦν γε καί) are translated what is more and introduce the strong statements of verse 8. Paul considered as loss not only the things already listed (vv. 5-6), but everything (v. 8). In exchange for confidence in the flesh Paul gained the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus personally. Christ was now his Lord.

His former “gains” (κέρδη, v. 7) he considered “rubbish” (which can mean food scraps or dung) so that he might gain (κερδήσω) Christ. Nothing else really mattered to him any longer. Having Christ as his Savior and Lord so far surpassed anything he had in Judaism.

Those who “gain Christ” (v. 8) are those found in Him (v. 9). Christ is in the believer and the believer is in Christ. Paul wanted his life to demonstrate these truths. Being in Christ, he was not clinging to any righteousness of his own doing associated with Law-keeping. Such a righteousness is viewed by God as no righteousness at all but rather as “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). The righteousness which saves and in which Paul rested is through (διὰ) faith in Christ. This is the only kind which comes from God and is by (ἐπί) faith. When a believing sinner responds in faith to the Spirit’s work in his heart, he is clothed in the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:24-26). In this position he is “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6, KJV). Thus robed, the believing sinner stands complete in Christ.

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⁴Robert P. Lightner, *Philippians* ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#); ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck; Accordance electronic ed. 2 vols.; Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 2:660.

7 Through his conversion on the Damascus road, Paul had learned to count such “advantages” as liabilities because of Christ. “Whatever” indicates that the previous listing was not exhaustive but illustrative. He once had regarded such things as “profit” (or “gains”—the Greek word *kerde* is plural) toward his goal of achieving righteousness by the law, but now he has come to the settled conviction that they were actually a detriment. They had not provided him with true righteousness at all. By trusting falsely in human performance, he had not only failed to make any progress toward the righteousness God requires but had also let his Jewish “advantages” drive him to persecute the church, which proclaimed the message of the righteousness of God received by faith, the only kind of righteousness God accepts.

8 “What is more” introduces a clause stressing that Paul’s experience on the Damascus road had produced a strong and lasting impression. The merits of Christ counted for everything. By using *panta* (“all things”) rather than *tauta* (“these things,” v.7), Paul’s thought broadens from his Jewish advantages just mentioned to include everything that might conceivably be a rival to his total trust in Christ. The “surpassing greatness” can be understood of Christ in an absolute sense, though it likely includes at least a sidelong glance at the list of supposed advantages he had once trusted in. Christ is far superior to them in every respect—so much so that Paul had cast them away as nothing but rubbish.

For Paul, the knowledge of Christ Jesus as his Lord meant the intimate communion with Christ that began at his conversion and had been his experience all the years since then. It was not limited to the past (as v.10 shows), but was a growing relationship in which there was blessed enjoyment in the present and the challenge and excitement of increasing comprehension of Christ in personal fellowship. In the interests of this sublime goal, Paul had willingly suffered the loss of all those things (*ta panta*) about which he had spoken, and continues to regard them as “rubbish” in order that he might “gain Christ.” Although at regeneration a person receives Christ, this is only the beginning of his discovery of what riches this entails. In Christ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Col 2:3), but to search them out and appropriate them personally requires a lifetime.⁵

⁵Homer A. Kent Jr., *Philippians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas, vol. 11 of [Expositor’s Bible Commentary](#). Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), paragraph 56171.

7 Paul introduces his new self-portrait with a simple, strong thesis statement: *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ*. Looking back, this statement makes an emphatic contrast with Paul's picture of himself as one who has good *reasons to put confidence in the flesh* (vv. 4-6); looking forward, this statement sets forth the terms that are expanded and developed in the enlarged picture of Paul's new life in Christ (vv. 8-11). The relative clause, *whatever were gains to me*, refers back to Paul's list of reasons for his superiority in the flesh and suggests that Paul could have added other impressive items to this list.⁸⁸ These privileges and achievements really *were gains* to Paul from the perspective of reasons to put confidence in the flesh. By using business accounting terms, Paul clearly states that he had gained profits as result of his heritage and his strict observance of the law.⁸⁹ The plural, *gains*, gives the picture of Paul evaluating and tabulating each of his assets on a net worth balance sheet. His exceptional net worth put him far ahead of his contemporaries. As he asserts in verse 4, he had *more* than all of them. For years, Paul had considered himself incredibly wealthy in terms of social and religious equity.

But now the main clause sets forth the shocking reversal in Paul's evaluation of his assets: *these I consider a loss for the sake of Christ*. Paul's radically new evaluation was the result of "an intellectual process."⁹⁰ His encounter with Christ did not shut off his mind, but set him free to think with a whole new depth and clarity about his life from a totally different perspective.⁹¹ His conversion was not an escape from reason but an illumination of reason. Once Christ became the goal of his life, he could finally see and understand the true value of his life in the light of Christ.

For the sake of Christ means that Christ is the reason why Paul considers his former *gains* as a *loss*.⁹² The perfect parallelism of this sentence sets forth Paul's life in the form of a balance sheet.

<i>Whatever</i>	<i>was</i>	<i>to me</i>	<i>gains,</i>
<i>these</i>	<i>I consider</i>	<i>because of Christ</i>	<i>loss.</i>

The shift from plural *gains* to singular *loss* indicates that Paul is not giving different values to each of his assets, discounting them at different rates: some are marked down 50%; others down 90%. Because of Christ, Paul has counted up all of his assets and considered them to be one huge liability. After his conversion to Christ, Paul recalculates the value of all of the advantages of his family and his accomplishments, his social class and his moral achievements, and then he enters the new bottom line: they all add up to one overwhelming disadvantage, one huge loss.⁹³

8 Paul now expands his thesis statement regarding his evaluation of his former gains to be a loss because of Christ. The strange combination of conjunctions at the beginning of verse 8 emphasizes the expansion: *What is more* (TNIV; similarly, NRSV: *More than that*), conveys the sense of Paul's use of five conjunctions to intensify and go further in asserting his loss because of Christ.⁹⁴ The change from the perfect tense, *I have considered*, to the present tense of the verb, *I consider*, stresses Paul's present attitude towards his gains and losses: he did not have any second thoughts about his previous decision; in fact, he reaffirmed and renewed his choice every day.⁹⁵ His present *I consider* continues and extends his past *I have considered* into his present and future experience.⁹⁶ Paul's renewed commitment to his past decision to live for Christ models for his readers how to *stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together with one accord for the faith of the gospel* (1:27). "Paul here attempts to inspire them by recounting how an overpowering experience in the past continues to motivate him in the present and give him hope for the future while he endures present trials."⁹⁷

Paul also expands the scope of his reevaluation because of Christ by changing the object of his consideration from *whatever* things and *these things* in verse 7 to *everything* and *all things* in verse 8. The pronouns, *whatever* and *these*, in verse 7 clearly refer to Paul's list in verses 5-6. These things, the privileges of his birth and the perfection of his righteousness based on the law, are considered a loss because of Christ. But now Paul goes further: he considers *everything a loss* because of Christ. This expansion enables Paul to move beyond the specifics of his own story and extend the list of things that are considered a loss to cover all things "that might compete with Christ for his allegiance."⁹⁸ In the

context, *everything* refers to all things which encourage *confidence in the flesh*.⁹⁹ Paul is reinforcing his assertion that *boasting in Christ Jesus* and requires putting *no confidence in the flesh* (verse 3). All rivals of Christ are totally devalued.

Paul explains with greater depth the reason for this drastic devaluation of everything. The simple phrase in verse 7 *because of Christ* is amplified in verse 8 to *because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*. When Paul speaks of *surpassing worth*, he is stating that the quality or value of knowing Christ excels and surpasses all alternatives. This surpassing greatness, “a decisive, superior, victorious factor”¹⁰⁰ far outweighs the value of anything else. When you put the value of knowing Christ on one side of the balance scale and everything else on the other side, *everything* else has no value whatsoever compared to *the surpassing worth of knowing Christ*.¹⁰¹

Knowing Christ Jesus my Lord changed Paul’s view of *everything*. This knowledge is above all the “personal acquaintance” of Christ Jesus.¹⁰² Paul did not gain this knowledge of Christ Jesus through his own theological reflection, but by receiving the revelation of Christ Jesus (2 Cor 4:6; Gal 1:12) and by acknowledging him as *my Lord*.¹⁰³ ...

Paul reminds his friends that knowing Christ cost him everything: *for whose sake I have lost all things*. When Paul says, *I have lost all things*, he is using the verb form of the noun, *loss*, that he has already used twice and is referring to “the loss of something with the implication of undergoing hardship or suffering.”¹⁰⁵ The aorist tense of the verb, *I have lost*, focuses on his conversion when his encounter with Christ and subsequent obedience to him caused Paul to renounce all of the privileges and advantages of his high social standing and religious achievements.¹⁰⁶ Whether Paul was forcefully stripped of all his privileges or willingly gave them up as a result of his conversion, the main point of his statement is clear: because of his commitment to Christ, Paul forfeited everything and suffered hardship. Paul is not speaking theoretically about the possibility of losing everything. He knew first hand that following Christ caused him to be excluded from the security and privilege of belonging to the Jewish community. He presents his own experience of suffering for his faith in Christ to thwart any attempt on the part of Judaizers to offer Philippian Christians the advantages of belonging to the Jewish community.¹⁰⁷ As a result of acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord, the Philippian Christians are in conflict with their Roman and Jewish neighbors who deny the Lordship of Jesus. They should expect that their allegiance to Christ Jesus as Lord will cause them to suffer hardship.

Paul takes his revaluation of his advantages in the flesh another radical step further by declaring, *I consider them garbage*. The word *garbage* denotes “excrement, manure, garbage, kitchen scraps.” In some Greek texts this term refers “specifically to human excrement.”¹⁰⁸ Paul not only considers all things as *loss*, but in this shocking statement he intensifies his renunciation of all things by referring to them as *garbage*. “The choice of the vulgar term stresses the force and totality of this renunciation.”¹⁰⁹ Paul gives the reason for this vulgar reference to all his privileges when he says, *I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ*. Because his goal is to *gain Christ*, anything that stands in the way of that goal must be rejected as utterly worthless and repulsive as garbage. The privileges of belonging to the Jewish community were highly valued and greatly appreciated by Paul (see Rom 3:1-2; 9:1-5). But these good things were considered as a *loss* and as *garbage* to Paul because they led to putting *confidence in the flesh* and stood in the way of the *surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*. What Paul renounced was not the wickedness of the flesh but all the goodness of his flesh. “That goodness is over and done with and abides under judgment; must not have any form of lurking place alongside of Christ.”¹¹⁰ The choice is clear: Are all privileges of the flesh my *gains* (verse 7) or will I seek to *gain Christ*? I can only *gain Christ* by considering all the *gains* of my flesh to be as worthless as *garbage*. Now Paul’s new balance sheet of his net worth is complete. Paul has transferred all his former gains, all of his assets, over to the liability column. He made this transfer *in order to gain Christ*, the one incomparable asset of surpassing worth.⁶

⁶G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, [Pillar New Testament Commentary](#). Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 232-237.