

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the time we have in our sermon today, I would like to accomplish something life-changing. I know, it's a lofty goal. But with God's help, I believe we can do it.

Today I want to get to the very heart and core of who you are and your value system. What is at the root and foundation of the way you look at the world and your purpose in the world?

I fear that we often spend lots of time looking at symptoms instead of the disease. We look at consequences of our root problem and addressing those consequences, instead that root problem itself.

Imagine a large crack develops in a wall in your house. So you plaster it up and repaint it. Problem solved! But it's not. A month or two later, the crack reappears at the same spot. What do you do? Plaster and paint again? Wouldn't it be wiser to look into what's causing the crack? If your foundation is bad and it's settling, plastering the wall isn't really solving anything. Fix the foundation, and the problem of the reappearing crack will also be resolved.

So, how is your core? How good is your foundation? Upon what is your whole life built? The Lord Jesus Christ came into our world and into our hearts... not to patch up the cracks in the walls. He came to give us an entirely new foundation. Jesus didn't come to give us medicine to that will help our sick and dying hearts. He came to give us a heart transplant. Jesus came to make a radical change.

So what's most important for you? I realize, this may be something you haven't given much thought to. We go through life just following the path before us... sometimes giving little thought to whether it's the path we want to be on. So today, let's think. What is at the core? What's most important?

Do you like to study the Bible and come to worship? Why? Do you like an easy life free of problems and worry? Why? If you had to suffer because you are a Christian, would you rejoice, or would you be angry? If I were to ask you, "What are your goals? What do you hope to do with your life?" Would your answer include anything spiritual or eternal?

So this is what I'm talking about today. Ask yourself a bunch of "why" questions to discover what's at the core. Why do you do what you do? Why do you have the job you have? Why do you come to church? Why do you volunteer your time for the things you volunteer your time for? Today, ask the question: "Why."

The apostle Paul was forced to look at his core values and the very foundation of his life when the risen Lord Jesus confronted Paul one day when he was on the road to Damascus. That confrontation ended up completely turning Paul's life upside down. Will your life be turned upside down today?

Look at Paul's life and what he valued before Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus. Paul B.C. (before Christ) valued his **pure Israelite heritage** which he could even trace back to the tribe of Benjamin and therefore to Jacob, Isaac and Abraham himself. Why? God has made a special covenant with Abraham. Paul was a blood descendent of Abraham. Therefore, this made him more right with God than others. Paul B.C. valued that he was a **Pharisee**. Why? At the core he believed that a right relationship with God was established by Paul and his own works. He

had joined the strictest and most zealous religious sect of his day... and he was prominent among them! He studied God's laws in great detail, and kept them better than nearly everyone in Israel. Surely this made him more right with God. Paul B.C. valued his **zeal for God**. In fact, so zealous was Paul, that he took it upon himself to actively stamp out an upstart sect that was claiming the promised Christ had already come. He believed that this zeal for God was noticed by God and something that earned God's approval. Finally, Paul valued his **legalistic righteousness**. He valued how he so closely followed the letter of the law... even if the spirit of the law was totally lost to him. In doing so, he believed God would be satisfied, and again, he would earn God's approval.

Now listen carefully. Was Paul's heritage inherently bad? Was being a Pharisee automatically evil? Was zeal a bad thing? Was doing the requirements of the law bad? No to all. In and of themselves, these things were not bad. But get back to the core. Look at the foundation. Get back to Paul's motives and purposes, and that's where we find what's bad. At the core was Paul's belief that if he tried hard enough, he would *deserve* God's approval and favor. At the core was, "If I'm going to be right with God, all depends on me! God will *owe* me heaven when I'm through!"

Friends, what is at your core? Here's the problem. "Paul B.C." can be found deep in the heart of each one of us. Rooted deep within us is this thought that I can do what it takes to earn God's approval and favor. Deep within us is that idea of "performance-based salvation." If I pray enough, go to church enough, do enough kind things, say enough kind words, repent enough, read the Bible enough, volunteer enough... if I'm a good enough Mom, a good enough Dad... if I make good enough dinners and clean my house enough... if I excel at my job and am well liked by my friends..... *then* God will approve of me and shower me with divine favors, and hopefully even eternal life.

God is coming to you and to me today to make a complete and radical transformation. He comes today to change us at the core, and to switch our sand foundation for one that's solid as a rock. It's the core transformation that happened to the apostle Paul, and God works it in us too. Listen to the text: Philippians 3:7-11.

"But whatever was to my profit [before knowing Christ] 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.

Do you see the difference Christ made in the life of the apostle Paul? Paul explains it in terms of a balance sheet. On a balance sheet a company or an individual can determine net worth. Put all the assets (the valuable things) in one column. Put all your liabilities (money, inventory or equipment owed) in another column. Take the total value of assets minus the total amount of your liabilities, and the resulting number (hopefully positive) is the net worth.

So imagine the radical change Paul describes. He doesn't say, "I wrongly valued some of my assets and liabilities and need to make some adjustments." No, when he came to know Christ, he realized his entire accounting system was wrong. His old accounting system had a great big picture of the apostle Paul at the top. It was all about him and his accomplishments, merits and performance. And so Paul B.C. put his righteousness, effort and performance in the asset category. And compared to others, he saw the great value he had accumulated in those things. And Paul saw the biggest liability as Jesus Christ. This new belief was damaging and wrong, he thought!

But then Paul met Christ, and that turned everything on its head. He didn't need to make a few adjustments to his old balance sheet. He had to crumble it up and toss it in the garbage. The righteousness he needed and which God required could not come from Paul. As good as he was, he

still fell far short of God's holy and perfect requirements. He fully understood that all his righteous acts were as filthy rags. His attitudes were wrong and his heart was corrupt and that meant whatever deed flowed out of his heart would also be corrupt. All that he formally considered valuable now became worse than useless! It was a liability. This concept of "performance based salvation" was the very thing keeping him from salvation.

Instead of a balance sheet with a big, glorious picture of Paul at the top, he needed a new balance sheet that had a big picture of a cross with a circle around it, and Paul inside that circle... Paul in Christ Jesus.

Paul found that when it comes to salvation, everything hinges on Christ. The righteousness God requires, God gives us through Christ Jesus. His holy life met the Father's requirements and expectations. And by faith, God credits that life to us. Jesus' death on the cross was the rightful payment for the sins of the world... and it was Jesus who made that payment. Through faith in Christ and what he accomplished at the cross, my sins are forgiven... completely paid for and gone forever. The new balance sheet was built on the premise that the righteousness we need is provided by God himself.

Friends, this completely changes our purpose in life just as it changed the purpose of Paul's life. He said, **"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."**

Our God has saved us, removed our guilt and guaranteed heaven to us. Now our value system is changed. We're different at the core. We don't live our daily life for self. But to God and his praise and glory. We don't live our lives in fear and dread, hoping that maybe we'll do enough that God will approve and show us divine favor. We live in peace and joy knowing our forgiveness, life and salvation are a done deal. And so we live those peaceful and joyful lives to God's honor and glory.

So what becomes valuable on this new balance sheet? Remember, at the top is the cross, a circle, and you inside it. So what's valuable? 1) Knowing Christ and his love is extremely valuable... which means Bible study and worship time. 2) The power of Christ's resurrection is extremely valuable... which means setting our sights out of this world and to eternal life to come. 3) The fellowship of sharing in Christ's sufferings is extremely valuable. That's right suffering for and with Christ because we are believers is an asset and of great value! It forces you to take attention off yourself and put it on Christ. It reminds us that we are tied up with him now for eternity. There's tremendous value in that!

With this new balance sheet in hand, could you take time to rethink everything you're doing in your life. How does your marriage look on the balance sheet. Is your role in the marriage highlighting Christ crucified and risen and honoring your Savior with thoughts, words and actions? Or the opposite. Time to make some radical changes. Do you need to change your attitude about your job and career now that Christ is on the top of your balance sheet? How do you spend time in a given week? How do you spend money? With your core values and foundation reset on the Christ crucified, is it time to make some radical changes?

Remember, in God's accounting system and in Christ Jesus: Total Loss Brings Great Gain. May God give us the knowledge, motivation and determination to reshape our lives knowing we are in Christ. His holiness and perfection is ours. His eternal life is now ours. Heaven is our home. Go back to these basics, go back to the core each and every day. See what a difference it makes in your life! Amen.