

Do you measure up? How tall are you...in centimeters? (Measuring tape)

At the end of World War I, General John Pershing (**picture**) commander of the American forces at the Western Front, sent word to the troops in Europe announcing a victory parade through the streets of Paris. There were two requirements for the soldiers to qualify to march in the parade: They had to have a good record; and, they had to be at least 186 centimeters tall.

Word came to one company of American soldiers and the excitement began to grow about how great it would be to march in the victory parade. Yet, being Americans, no one knew for sure just how tall 186 centimeters was. The men began comparing themselves, lining up back to back to see who was the tallest. The taller men in the company were ribbing the shorter ones, "Too bad for you, Shorty! We'll think of you when we're in Paris!"

Then the officer came to find out if there were any candidates for the parade. He put the mark on the wall at 186 centimeters. Some men took one look at the mark and walked away, realizing that they weren't even close. Others tried, but fell short by a small amount. Finally, the tallest man in the troop stood up to the mark and squared his shoulders, but discovered that he was a quarter of an inch shy of the mark (6' 1"). When those men compared themselves with themselves, some thought they were tall enough to qualify. But when the standard came, it proved that none of them qualified.

Do you measure up? It's commonly thought that the way to get into heaven is by being a good person. People who believe that compare themselves with others and think, "I'm good enough because I'm better than... I don't do..."

Most people, maybe you believe this too, believe someone goes to heaven because they're good enough. Many justify and convince themselves that they're good enough for heaven. They're not perfect, but they're pretty good.

How good does a person have to be to get into heaven? Jesus set the standard in His Sermon on the Mount: "*You therefore must be **perfect**, as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (Matt. 5:48). Jesus cuts out anyone who thinks that they're good enough to qualify for heaven on their own merit. Please read Matthew 5-7 for yourself.

In that sermon Jesus said that if we've been angry with someone, we've broken God's law and are guilty enough to go into the fiery hell (Matt. 5:22). He said that to lust in your heart is like committing adultery. The absolute righteousness of God isn't just for our outward behavior, but in our thoughts. It's the standard we must live up to in order to get into heaven. But none of us make the cut. We all find that we're **Coming up short**.

It's the truth of Romans 3:23, "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Galatians 2:16, "*by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.*"

Have you attended the funeral of someone and you knew that they were an evil person, yet still many talked about them being in a "better place?"

In spite of the repeated clear teaching of the Bible, the error persists that anyone who by human standards is a decent person will get into heaven on the basis of his/her good deeds. But if you can be good and go to heaven, God sacrificing Jesus on the cross makes no sense. Yet, it's harder for good people to believe they need the cross and the gospel than any other group.

The key word in our passage in Philippians 3 is *count* (vss. 7 & 8). It's the idea of *evaluating or assessing*. "*The unexamined life is not worth living,*" said Socrates (**picture**). Yet very few take time to evaluate their lives and eternal future. They procrastinate considering death and eternity, assuming that they're good enough. At the root of this self-deception is pride.

If you read the book of Acts, you'll find that Paul was hounded by a group of false teachers, called Judaizers. While they didn't deny that a person must trust Christ for salvation, they added works, obeying the Mosaic Law, particularly the Jewish rite of circumcision, as a requirement for salvation.

If anyone should have made the cut, it was Paul. In our passage he argues that if anyone could be right with God on the basis of being good, it was himself. But on the Damascus Road (Acts 9), he realized that all the things he was counting on for merit with God were worthless. He threw them all on the trash heap and laid hold of Christ through faith.

Trusting in our own goodness, we always **come up short**. The picture here is a ledger sheet of your life. Before Christ, you entered on the asset side a number of things you thought were gains that qualified you for heaven. But, if you've truly met Jesus Christ, if you've accepted the gospel, you had to take all those things and move them to the debit side.

To tell someone that they can go to heaven by being baptized, moral, serving, or being good, is spiritual poison. It's what the Judaizers were doing. It's what many preachers who are teaching people to be nice or good to go to heaven are doing. If you're taking notes...

1. “Be good” salvation teachers are soul murderers, *“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh”* (vs. 2). When I read this verse, that song, *Who let the dogs out?* (**picture**) starts playing in my mind. This isn’t a verse you’ll see used for a memory verse for Vacation Bible School. It’s not a mild-mannered statement. Paul lets loose with some righteous indignation. Why is he so upset?

His anger stemmed from the arrival in Philippi of a group known as Judaizers. They taught that you couldn’t be a Christian unless you obeyed the Mosaic Law. They taught that salvation is the result of something we *do* rather than faith in what God has already *done*.

Religion without Christ is dangerous. Many trust in religiosity to get them into heaven, but it was religious men who crucified Jesus.

You can pray all of the time, listen to Christian radio, sing Christian songs, be baptized, take Communion...you can even drop a million bucks in the offering BUT if you don’t know Jesus, it’s won’t do you a bit of good.

Paul uses three words to describe these **soul murderers**: dogs, evil workers, and mutilators of the flesh. Three times he uses the word *“beware!”*

Paul started the church in Philippi and preached a gospel that’s “Christ + nothing = salvation.” In other words, faith in Jesus is all you need. Lots of people came to know Christ in that church. There were a lot of baby Christians. But Paul had to leave. So, who is he writing about?

Though it may appear that he’s referring to three different groups; he’s describing three distinguishing characteristics of one group – these Judaizers.

They were dogs. Orthodox Jews would call a Gentile a “dog.” It’s not a compliment to be called a *dog*. In Paul’s day it was a big insult. Dogs were coyote-like scavengers who lived on roadkill and garbage. They were the epitome of what it meant to be unclean. The great irony of this rebuke is that he turns the table on his fellow Jews, declaring: “You’re the ones who have rejected God! You’re leading people astray through your false teaching. You’re the dirty dogs!”

They were evil workers. Paul calls these men, who prided themselves on their good works, *“evil workers.”* Outwardly they were zealous for religious activities. But their religious works were evil in God’s sight, because they took pride in their own achievements and trusted in their good deeds as the means of making themselves right before God.

The Bible is clear that we’re saved by grace through faith apart from any works (Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-8). While genuine saving faith always results in good works, doing the right things follows salvation. The order of faith and works is essential! No human efforts can ever commend us to God. A true Christian never glories in his good works, but glories in Christ alone.

They were the mutilation. Paul uses a pun on the word “circumcision.” The word he uses literally means “mutilation.” Circumcision, the Judaizers’ greatest source of pride, is interpreted as mutilation. Paul is saying, “you’ve mutilated the flesh of these young believers.”

While there’s nothing wrong with traditions or rituals, none of them will earn salvation. Many mistakenly think religious rituals will get them into heaven. But, as Jesus told the very religious Nicodemus, *“... unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3).

A lady was arguing with her pastor about faith and works. She said, “I think that going to heaven is like rowing a boat. One oar is faith and the other is works. If you use both, you get there. If you use only one, you go around in circles.” “There’s only one thing wrong with your illustration,” replied the pastor. “Nobody is going to heaven in a rowboat.”

2. A resume of self-righteousness is rubbish, *“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless”* (vss. 3-6).

Paul had a fantastic record. In today’s terms he’d won all the marbles: the Pulitzer, the Medal of Honor, the MVP, the Heisman Trophy, the Gold Medal and a Super-Bowl Ring. No one’s Judaic trophy case was bigger than his. If they’d had the media, he’d be the big story with his picture all over the screen. Humanly speaking, religiously speaking – he’d arrived.

Instead of getting him into heaven, Paul’s list of qualifications was keeping him out. There’s nothing wrong with combing your hair, but if you substitute combing your hair for breathing before long combing your hair is going to kill you. There’s nothing wrong with being born into a good family or doing good things. There’s nothing wrong with faithfully attending church or being baptized. But if you substitute any of it for knowing Jesus as your personal Savior, it will cost you heaven.

Some years ago when the Superbowl was in New Orleans, someone advertised Superbowl tickets in *USA Today* at a fantastic rate. They sold hundreds of them around the country. Many paid several hundred dollars for tickets. They paid

for airfare to New Orleans, walked up to the Superbowl with their tickets in hand but when they got there, Superbowl officials said the tickets were counterfeit, leaving them shocked and angry. They really thought they were buying Superbowl tickets, but someone had conned them.

Paul said that if he'd died before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and stood before God and was asked why he should be let into heaven, he'd have gotten out his list of credentials, but it wouldn't help. It was a con. Those who bought fake Superbowl tickets were sincere, but sincerely wrong.

Many believe that they are going to get into heaven because of how good they are. The Bible says, "*He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy*" (Titus 3:5).

3. Salvation begins with surrender, "*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.*"

As Paul considers his life before coming to Christ, he does a mental accounting to draw up a spiritual profit-loss statement. On the Profit side he puts two words: Jesus Christ. On the Loss side, he lists those many things he used to brag about. Think about that. Paul casts aside his national heritage, his ethnic background, his religious training, his family heritage, his years of education, his training as a Pharisee, his reputation for religious zeal, and his standing as a man of high moral character. He's saying, "It doesn't matter. It's all dung to me. The only thing that matters is knowing Jesus Christ."

Why did Paul come to such a radical conclusion? When we read about "*rubbish*," we normally assume he's talking about things that God calls sinful. For most, the "rubbish" of life involves angry thoughts, bad habits, dabbling in porn, immorality, idolatry, racism, gossip, griping and the other "bad stuff" we know is wrong. If I said to you, "Get the rubbish out of your life," how many would instinctively think about your ethnic heritage or your college education or years attending church? But that's precisely what Paul is talking about. Anything that keeps you from Christ is "rubbish" and "dung," no matter how good it looks to you.

It's not that the things on Paul's list were wrong. Most were morally neutral. There was nothing wrong with being circumcised (God commanded it in the Old Testament), or being from the tribe of Benjamin. There's nothing wrong with zealously keeping God's law. Heritage issues were things he couldn't change about his own background or lifestyle choices, and with the exception of persecuting the church, none were in themselves sinful. But they were "*rubbish*" to him because he'd trusted in them, not Jesus. He took great pride in them and looked down on others because of them. He evaluated everything in their light. In the end, those things were the "dung" that had to be thrown overboard so he could come to Jesus.

Circle that word "*rubbish*" in your mind. The Greek word is *skubala* used only here in the New Testament. It literally means "dung" or "excrement." As Paul looked at his resume, he said, "It's all dung in my eyes compared with the privilege of knowing Christ my Lord." But after meeting Jesus, Paul realized that the only thing that had true value was *knowing* Christ. Did you know that you can know a person **four** ways?

We can know them **historically**. We know Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, and Eleanor Roosevelt that way. All our knowledge of them is taken from history.

Or, we can know a person **contemporaneously**. We know Governor Evers, Queen Elizabeth, and Ryan Braun this way. These live contemporaneously with us. New facts are being uncovered about them every day. But all of our knowledge of them is drawn from a distance.

We can also know a person **contactually**. This is how we relate to the teller at the bank, the clerk at Culvers and many of our neighbors. We have contact with these people; our lives touch. We talk with them, but our relationship never moves beyond a surface kind of experience.

Finally, we can know a person **experientially**. We know our husbands and wives, children, and special friends this way. This is that deep kind of knowledge that comes out of personal experience and intimate communion.

It's the kind of knowing Paul had in mind when he repeatedly referred to knowing Jesus. The word in the original refers to *knowledge gained through personal experience and intimate companionship*. It's a knowing that comes from a very close relationship.

Unfortunately, a lot of people just know about Jesus. He's very popular. I don't think any other person has ever been featured on the front cover of *TIME* magazine as often as Jesus. But there's a big difference between knowing *about* and *knowing* Jesus. A relationship, **experiential** knowing has infinite value. Paul discovered his friendship with Jesus provided him with real righteousness. Through His death on the cross Jesus took our sinfulness on Himself. 2

Corinthians 5:21: *“For our sake God made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Jesus we might become the righteousness of God.”*

4. Salvation brings great joy. Henry Ward Beecher (**picture**) said, *“The test of Christian character should be that a man is a joy-bearing agent to the world.”* As we tie things up, look back to verse 1: *“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.”* When Paul says *“finally,”* he’s not concluding things. It simply means he’s starting a new section.

Paul returns their attention again to his emphasis on *rejoicing*. He’s already mentioned *“rejoicing”* 11 times in chapters one and two! But, he’s going to remind them again, because joy is a vital part of the genuine Christian life.

Rejoicing in the Lord is the antidote to rejoicing in self-reliance or personal achievement. It takes the focus off of us. It humbles us and gives us hope to rejoice in the Lord. *“Rejoice in the Lord”* is a summary of true Christianity.

How do you measure up? Are you **coming up short**? Test yourself by this measure: *True Christians rejoice in the Lord.*

What does that mean? It means Jesus Christ is everything to a true Christian. Christ, and Christ alone, is our salvation. Without Him, we’d be lost and without hope. In Him we’re saved and have hope!

Rejoicing in the Lord means that Jesus is everything to us and we are in Him. We’re to focus our thoughts on Him and what He’s done for us through the cross. We’ll be filled with joy in the Spirit as we daily walk with our eyes on the Lord Jesus and what He is to us. No matter what your circumstances, you can rejoice in God’s love, His attributes, provisions and promises.

Happiness depends upon happenings; joy depends upon Jesus. It’s a decision of your will. You can choose to celebrate Christ in the midst of the most difficult circumstances. It happens when you reject discontentment and instead choose to trust and praise the Lord.

In Africa there’s a fruit called the *“taste berry”* (**picture**). It changes a person’s taste so that everything, including sour fruit, becomes sweet and pleasant for several hours after eating the berry.

Praise is the *“taste berry”* of the Christian life. When you fill your day with gratitude, even sour situations can taste sweet. If you learn to praise God for who He is and what He’s done for you, gratitude will grow within you. Rather than asking God to remove difficulties, you may find yourself praying that He accomplishes His will in the midst of them.

Let me challenge you this week to take a notecard. Write down the many good gifts God has given you. Write down His blessings. Then spend time reading through that card daily (maybe several times a day) and watch the Lord radically transform your outlook on life.

Conclusion: My friend, you don’t have to **come up short**. When you finally come to the end of your life, what will you have to show for the 30 years or 50 years or 70 years, or even the 90 years you were on this earth?

The problem many have is that they’re playing in the rubbish heap of life. Their hands are covered with the junk of earthly gain that counts for nothing compared to knowing Jesus. 2,000 years ago the Lord Jesus asked the question this way: *“What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”* (Mark 8:36).

We’re all on a journey from time to eternity. Sooner than we think, we’ll be in a casket and people will be weeping over us. What will they say about you then? What will they put on your tombstone? *“He spent his life on things that didn’t matter”* or *“She met Jesus and her life was never the same.”*

Have you ever transferred money from one account to another? When Jesus died on the cross, two transfers took place. First, our overloaded account of sin was transferred into His empty account because He was sinless. But His account for sin got as big as the world’s sins.

But then, another transfer took place. When Jesus died on the cross, His account of righteousness, which was infinite was transferred into our account, which was empty, and we received His righteousness. It’s not our righteousness. Our righteousness is on the garbage dump. His righteousness applied to our account is the only thing that will get us into heaven.

Do you know Jesus? Or are you trusting in your own goodness, morality, or religion to get you to heaven? I urge you to do a new accounting of your life like Paul did, and figure out what truly matters and what doesn’t.

If you don’t know Jesus, you’re in danger of losing your soul. Nothing matters but knowing Christ and being found in Him. Are you willing to trade your spiritual resume for the righteousness of Jesus Christ?

Would you like to go to heaven? Here are five words that can take you there: *Only Jesus and Jesus only.* May God help you to leave the rubbish of your good deeds and run to the Cross where you can find new life in Christ.