

Philippians 3:17-4:1
“Which of the gods do you serve?”

“Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. (18) For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. (19) Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.

(20) But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (1) Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

This text deals with a life and death issue.

We often think about the subject, but we don't like to talk about it.

We dance all around the matter and put off dealing with it.



As with taxes, however, we can't put this issue on the back-burner long; we must ultimately face it.

This text speaks to our life's direction.

Colleges and universities advertise to prepare high school graduates for life's necessities.

Tech schools also tell us they know how to prep young folks for the future.

Financial institutions claim they'll help us through our so-called “golden years.”

Yet colleges, businesses, the media, and governments never deal with the real issue.

I know you've given serious thought to this and will so again—Covid19 shouts the matter.

- **We think about it when we lose loved ones.**
- **Our own mortality haunts us.**
- **We pound pillows on those sleepless nights when we're reminded we won't live forever.**

At least three questions grip us:

1. What, if anything, goes on after this life ends?

Will we find happy hunting grounds, nirvana, heavenly mansions or what?

Does anything exist beyond this life?

2. If something exists after this life ends, what does it take to obtain it?

Will I qualify for it?

What actions or beliefs will this require?

If attaining the afterlife requires a certain level of righteousness, have I done enough?

3. Will the power, knowledge, and lifestyle I’m presently banking on work for me?

The man who wrote Philippians became a distinguished attorney.

He knew laws and religions as well as anyone.

In his time, folks differed in their ideas about what it takes to find life.

Just like today, not everyone thought the same.

Lots of ideas floated among people.

Early on, the writer of our text felt sure of his views.

Poised, cool, and bold, this attorney thought his education, genius and skill gave him an edge.

He assumed he had it all.

He’d gained a lock on eternal life.

In that respect, he wasn’t unusual; year after year, opinion polls show that 75% of folks seem confident they’ll reach heaven.

They often doubt their neighbors will make it.

Yet they remain certain they’ll be there.

Our writer felt that confident.

He supposed he knew what eternal life is.

He assumed he held a valid key--

partly because he was a super-Jew from one of Israel’s best tribes.

He imagined himself exceptional—one of the chosen destined to heaven.

He attained superior education.

He did everything right.

His parents even gave him a fitting name.

Named after Saul, Israel’s first King (see verse 7), he claimed to be faultless.

Saul felt he’d earned a prominent heavenly place.

He had all of the gains—all the credits anyone could want—he thought.

One day, though, Saul realized he wasn’t worth diddle-de-squat.¹

How about you?

What life-score have you earned for the afterlife?

What type of balance do you figure you have?

There’s so much misinformation—

so many different ideas—

it’s important to know.

Let’s follow what he said in Philippians 3:7 & 8a:

“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.”

Recall those things that made Saul proud?

Education, parentage, good works--
following all the religious rules.



¹ Diddle-de-squat is a term made locally famous by our friend Wes Hirschman, who many years ago printed business cards identifying him as “CEO of Diddle-de-squat”

Most of us worry about income and outgo—profit and loss.

Saul regarded religious accomplishment that way.

In his view, he'd done everything right.

His deemed his balance sheet showed great profit.

He thought he deserved a good afterlife.

Some time ago, we noted how many of us assume we deserve eternity for doing a few good deeds over 70-90 years of life on earth.

Grant that the earth is 5 billion years old and we live 90 years.

Suppose we earn a year's credit for every year of life here.

In 90 years, what percent of 5 billion could we earn?

My initial calculations were incorrect.

I first arrived at this percentage: (.000000018%, the percentage of 5,000,000,000 that 90 represents).

I didn't move the decimal point as needed.

My sons-in law, Sean and Lloyd, and ex M-M-C math teacher, Kathy Wankum corrected me.

It should have been .0000018%.

Either figure shows the arrogance of assuming we can earn eternity.

Consider also the terms Saul used here.

He wrote: “whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ,”

Profit and loss concerned business folks then as now.

The following story illustrates profit and loss.

In Jesus' time, people consumed great amounts of wheat and barley bread.

The coastal region northwest of Nazareth (the tribe of Asher in OT times) grew much of Israel's grain.

The city of Rome (population about a million) consumed massive amounts of grain.

A huge department in the Roman government oversaw shipments of grain from Egypt.



They used ships thought to be 180-200 feet long that carried 1,300 tons each.²

Many of those grain ships were privately owned.

Investors owned the ships and contracted with the government to deliver the grain.

Suppose you're a ship owner and you contract with the government to haul grain from Egypt north to Italy.

Late in life, Saul was aboard a ship like that.

² Those vessels were probably twice the size of the Mayflower and the Santa Maria, the largest of Columbus's ships.

He was a prisoner; the government transporting him to Rome for trial. The ship conveying Saul was probably as long as an 8-man football field. It carried a heavy cargo of grain as well as 276 passengers and crew.

Remember, you own the ship.

The government will pay you handsomely for your services.

The government even pays you extra to transport prisoners and their guards.

Your ship is laden with needed grain.

You're already counting the dollars you'll earn.

Perhaps pay off a loan on the vessel and take it easy for a while in your villa.

You look forward to that cash-in-hand.

On the last leg of the trip, you're in a hurry and looking forward to home.

An unexpected storm batters your ship.

Hurricane-like winds drive your vessel off course; it loses its power and its rudder.

Your ship is swamped, ready to capsize; the captain orders the crew to start throwing cargo overboard.

Soon all your precious grain becomes fish food in the Mediterranean Sea.

And the worst happens.

Driven by the storm, your powerless, rudderless ship runs aground.

Waves pound the vessel and rip it apart.

You've lost your ship and you owe your creditors a heap of money.

You've suddenly lost major assets.



If you read Acts 27, you'll see that's precisely what happened to a ship owner.

That's the comparison Saul made to his own religious efforts.

He'd banked his eternity on his intelligence, his knowledge, and his hard work.

Yet he had nothing to show for his life-effort:

“Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss.”

He lost the profit he expected.

All sank into oblivion.

Deeply in debt his hard-earned-assets and profit turned to excrement.

But had Saul really lost?

Here's what he knew:

He knew life's brevity.

He understood life's fragility.

You, too, know how tenuous life is.

- **A single heart-beat.**
- **About a quart of blood.**

- **A 5 minute lack of oxygen to your brain.**
- **The wrong viruses and germs in you.**



Little separates any of us from extinction.

Once life is over it's done.

No one can buy, barter, arrange, or blackmail one more hour of life.

Saul knew life's fragility

He also knew he couldn't earn a day of eternity.

His life-efforts earned only garbage and excrement.

Remember our three starting questions?

- 1. If something does exist after this life ends, what does it take to obtain it?**

Knowledge, keeping commandments, and doing great things can't buy life.

We attain it by believing in Jesus the Son of God—the only son of his kind.

He, the creative, intelligent force of the Universe took on human form.

He lived the only fully righteous life ever.

Jesus came from God and brought God's gift—the righteousness we need.

That's why Saul wrote: **“Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.”**

- 2. What, if anything, goes on after this life ends?**

Most people don't expect what Saul talked about. Most folks think their soul or spirit will fly off to heaven when they die.

Jesus never communicated that.

No apostle taught anything like that.

- **Saul knew that we're not immortal and won't be until the resurrection day.**³
- **We hope in resurrection from the dead, not immortality of the soul.**

Listen to what Saul-Paul wrote in 3: 10, 11:

“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, (11) and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Life ends when we die.

We know someone bigger than life, however.

Through his resurrection power, Jesus Christ brings us to life again.

Just as Christ was raised from death, he'll bring us back from the dead.

- 3. How certain is this hope on which we depend? Christ returned from the dead.**

³ See 1 Corinthians 15:51-54

**The only one who lived and never sinned
promises us life again.**

**He alone rose from the dead never to die again.
He is the only one not bound by time and space.**

**Jesus paid all of Saul’s debt.
He paid your debt and mine.**

**Saul knew something few people realize.
Heaven doesn’t come automatically to believers.**

**“Not that I have already obtained all this,
or have already been made perfect, but I
press on to take hold of that for which Christ
Jesus took hold of me” (Phil 3:12 NIV).**

**We must persevere in faith and commitment.
How many races have been lost a few
yards from the finish line?**

**No one struts proudly into the Kingdom.
Neither can we let worry and worldly
concerns addle us.**

**“Their destiny is destruction, their god is
their stomach, and their glory is in their
shame. Their mind is on earthly things.”**

Fleshly temptations and faces in the crowd distract.

Saul knew he had to stay faithful to the finish line.

**“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have
taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting
what is behind and straining toward what is**

**ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the
prize for which God has called me heavenward
in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:13, 14 NIV).**

**I pray that all of us will keep on trusting Christ
and living for Him.**

Though we don’t deserve it

God gives us eternity in and with Christ.

**“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly
await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, (21)
who, by the power that enables him to bring
everything under his control, will transform our
lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious
body. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom
I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how
you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!”**

Praise God for his mercy in Jesus Christ!

Bob Blair
PO Box 176
Cleghorn, IA 51014



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