

Gaining in Christ Jesus

Key Verse: “*What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.*”
—**Philippians 3:7**

Selected Scripture:
Philippians 3:7-11

THIS HEART-FELT EXPRESSION made by the Apostle Paul in our Key Verse takes on greater meaning when we investigate his background. It has been recorded that Paul's parents were probably wealthy, that they were both Jewish, and that they most likely named him Saul after Israel's first king. His family was very religious, being devout followers of the Mosaic Law, as shown by Paul's own words: “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee.” (Acts 23:6) At a young age, he was sent to Jerusalem to attend the school of Gamaliel, a renowned doctor of the Law. In addition, through his early association with educated Greeks, he gained the important ability to debate others and to use persuasive techniques in his speech. This would later help him when he addressed people from all walks of life. Paul's high level of education is revealed to us in his words: “I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers.”—Acts 22:3

It has been surmised that Paul's conversion to be a follower of Christ perhaps isolated him from his home and family, and that it also deprived him of the income

that he had previously enjoyed. (Rom. 9:1-8) He was, however, very willing to give up all things for Christ's sake. We recall that he, perhaps at some early point in his life, had learned a trade—that of tent-making. This was not out of the ordinary for the time. Even among the wealthy, it was customary for them to have their sons learn trades. It is interesting to note that Paul had to turn to his tent-making trade at times, and would seem to imply that financial support from his family had stopped. We see from his experiences with Aquila and Priscilla when he visited them in Corinth that this was true. “Because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.” (Acts 18:1-3) Yet, in spite of the physical work that he had to do at times in order to provide for his temporal needs, he never forgot that his chief mission in life was to preach the Gospel.

Paul was faithful in adhering to the words that our Lord Jesus spoke to his disciples, when he said, “Seek, and ye shall find.” (Luke 11:9) He was led by his faith in God, and he knew that this would be the key to gain the prize that he so desired. “Without faith it is impossible to please him.” (Heb. 11:6) He further knew that it was necessary to apply these words in his life, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.” (Matt. 6:33) In giving this admonition, Jesus was contrasting our proper interest as New Creatures in eternal heavenly things with the interests of most in the world, whose primary focus is on the temporal earthly things of life.

As we endeavor to make our calling and election sure, let us have the same single-mindedness of Paul, expressed in these words, “Brethren, I count not myself not to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:13,14 ■