

Balancing the Budget

Putting Life into Perspective: Part 3
Philippians 3:4b—14

Introduction

I'm not an accountant, banker, or a businessman. So, when we get the Treasurer's Report at the monthly Board of Directors' meetings, I look at three numbers: how much we took in, how much we spent, and the checking account balance. What I understand about a budget is that it is a guide based on previous spending. The goal is to spend the budgeted amount—no more and no less. Going over puts you in the red, and that's not good. Staying under the budgeted amount seems good, but your budget next year will be smaller, and you may go over budget that year. **PUTTING LIFE INTO PERSPECTIVE** helps us to understand the *budget* of salvation.

The Ledger of Life

I call it a "budget" because some people treat life as if God has a ledger and He weighs the good and bad of our life to determine our end result. Sometimes, I'll be talking with loved ones of a recently deceased person and ask them to tell me a little bit about him. They'll proceed with a litany of all the good things this man has ever done, making sure to mention that he was a *good and faithful member of the church*. To hear them talk, you'd think he never did anything wrong, never hurt anyone, never raised his voice, never said anything bad about anyone. But they leave out the most important part of his life: "He believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior." They want to make sure that I know that he was *good enough* to get into heaven, even though that's not my call.

When "Good" Isn't Good Enough

Then, there are the people I've talked to over the years, who, when the subject of heaven comes up, say, "I hope I make it. I hope I've been good enough." The truth is none of us are *good enough*. Paul says that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)*. David says in *Psalms 14* (read *Psalms 14:2—3*). God demands righteousness. He says, "*Be holy, for I am holy*" (*Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:16*). Yet Isaiah says, (Read *Isaiah 64:6*). If it were up to us and our own works, we'd never "balance the budget." We would all perish eternally in hell.

The Net Gain – Faith

But Paul says that we can have a righteousness, a righteousness not found in our works or the Law, *but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith (Philippians 3:9)*. The righteousness that balances the budget and gives eternal life comes from God, not our good works. And it depends on faith, which is a gift of grace from God. Faith in the crucified, risen Christ is the only thing that counts. Notice all Paul had going for him before he met Christ on the road to Damascus. He was born an Israelite, one of God's chosen people, tracing his heritage to the tribe of Benjamin. He was circumcised on the eighth day, in accordance with the Law. He was a Pharisee, known for keeping the Law. In fact, according to the Law, he was blameless. But having met Jesus, he now sees that all that is *rubbish (v. 8)*. He knows that faith in Christ is all that counts. It's the only thing that matters. When we put life into perspective, we see that all our good works count for nothing.

The Balanced Budget

Remember what I said the goal of a budget was? It is to come out even, with a net zero gain, where everything balances out to nothing. But that's not the goal of the salvation budget. Paul even longs to *share in the sufferings of Christ (v. 10)*. He longs for something that seems like it would be a bad thing because of what he knows is the end result. That, *becoming like [Christ] in His death, that by any means possible [he] may attain the resurrection of the dead (v. 11)*.

Means of Grace

BALANCING THE BUDGET, when talking about salvation leads us to eternal life with Christ in heaven. and the budget is balanced through faith. That faith is a gift of God, a gift we receive through the means of grace. God works faith in us through the Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion. Paul says that *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17)*. He also says: *You are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:26—27)*. Jesus, when giving the bread and wine at the Last Supper, said, *"This is My body, which is for you" (1 Corinthians 11:24)* and *"This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28)*. Hear the Word, receive the Sacrament, and receive the faith that balances the budget for salvation by cancelling out our sins.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
