
WHO WAS PAUL?

Today we are going to look at who Paul was before he became a Christian. We have already seen the kind of man Paul became after he accepted Christ, so this is a great reminder about what God can do when we allow Him to work in our lives. Here are our verses for today.

Philippians 3:4-6 says,

“Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation 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 the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.”

Yesterday we looked at Paul’s warnings about legalism and the contrast between legalism and true spirituality. Today we are focusing on the life of legalism Paul lived before He understood the grace of God and accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior.

We ended yesterday with the statement that the true circumcision, those who are spiritual and not legalistic, do not put any confidence in the flesh. They do not rely on their own abilities to achieve the righteousness of God. In verse four Paul starts out by saying that, “although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more.” Paul wants us to understand that before he was a Christian, he was extremely legalistic. If anyone thinks they have a reason to choose legalism as a means to salvation and eternity, Paul has a thousand more reasons. He goes on to give us those reasons in verses five through six.

Paul's Legalistic Qualifications

- 1) Circumcised the eighth day: We looked at the doctrine of circumcision and established that as a Jew the Abrahamic Covenant specified that the male was to be circumcised on his eighth day.
- 2) Of the nation of Israel: Paul was a descendant of Abraham. He was of the Israelite race. The Covenant between Abraham and God was given to his people.
- 3) Of the tribe of Benjamin: The Jews kept a careful record of their lineage. Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin, the youngest great grandson of Abraham.
- 4) Hebrew of Hebrews: Paul met all the qualification necessary to identify himself as a member of God's chosen people.
- 5) A Pharisee: There were two groups of people practicing the Law. The Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees held a more liberal view of the Law, where the Pharisees were conservative. They practiced Hebrew customs, spoke Hebrew or Aramaic and took the Law very literally. Paul was a Pharisee.
- 6) A persecutor of the church: Even though this may seem like a strange legalistic quality, Paul's reason for persecuting the church was because of its foundation in the doctrine of grace that Christ taught. Paul was committed to wiping out those who believed in a system of grace, especially those Gentiles who accepted Christ's teachings.
- 7) Blameless according to the Law: This was not a claim to perfection, but an explanation that Paul followed all purification rituals when he sinned and observed special days and rituals outlined in the Law.

Wow! If the Law was what God required for salvation, Paul had it nailed. Thankfully, it isn't. The Law makes our sin evident and shows us how unfit we are to keep its commandments.

Read Romans 3:20.

Even though most of us don't practice the Law, we are still ensnared by legalism in other forms. What then, as Christians, are we called to do? Are we called to do all that Jesus did? In some ways, but our actions should always be a result of our fellowship with God and the leading of the Holy Spirit, not our own attempts to gain righteousness. Often times our list of Christian "do's and don'ts" gets so long that we become frustrated by our continual failures and overwhelmed by the length of that list!

Write out your personal list of do's and don'ts.

Anything on our list should be preceded by "Am I in fellowship?!" If the answer to that question is "yes," then the do's and don'ts fall into place as a result of God working in us. It is only when we are in fellowship, living under the control of the Holy Spirit that our works mean anything to God anyway.

With the last paragraph in mind, is there anything in your list you want to revise?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. We either produce gold, silver and precious stones or wood hay and stubble. The first category comes from works performed while under the control of the Holy Spirit and the second comes from works performed while under the control of the flesh. Only the first category matters to God! We will look more at this concept tomorrow, for now let's do a quick review of the concepts we talked about today.

REVIEW

~Paul identified that his life as a legalist gave him more reason than anyone else to claim legalism as a means to salvation.

~ Paul identified seven fleshly qualities:

1. Circumcised the eighth day
2. Of the nation of Israel
3. Of the tribe of Benjamin
4. A Hebrew of Hebrews
5. A Pharisee
6. A persecutor of the Church
7. Blameless according to the law

~ The Law is not a means for salvation. It magnifies our sin. Romans 3:20

~ Living under the control of the Holy Spirit is the only way we will produce righteous works.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15.