***The True Circumcision of God - PH67-02

Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 3:3-6***

Turn with me in your Bibles to Philippians 3:3-6. We're going to continue with our study from the last session. This is the third increment on the true circumcision of God.

**Celebrities**

Human viewpoint is impressed with people who are celebrities in our society. Most people are so shallow that they eagerly pay attention even to fools as long as those fools are celebrities. All you have to do is watch television for a while and observe the celebrities of the entertainment world. I don't know whether you've had the experience that I have so often had – to sit there and shake my head at what was being portrayed as humor and entertainment, and have to say to myself, "The programs at the Berean Banquet are a lot funnier; a lot more clever; a lot more subtle; and, a lot more significant. They're just a whole lot more entertaining than this idiocy that is often on the tube for the boobs who are engaged in human viewpoint entertainment.

It is fantastic how many people are impressed by celebrities just because they're celebrities. Not only can you notice this among entertainers, but all you have to do is look at our politicians. Obviously, nobody gets to Washington to perform the inanities that are performed by the United States Congress unless somebody was inane enough, to begin with, to be impressed by this person as a celebrity to send him there. We don't send nobodies to Congress. We send celebrities to Congress.

So it is quite a commentary on the American public (at least on certain states), as you look at the representatives that states will send to Congress. Politicians, very easily and very often, because they are engrossed in human viewpoint mentalities (that which Romans 1 describes as a darkened mentality) qualify for the position of fools. So because people are not oriented to divine viewpoint, they are impressed by celebrities in our society. As a matter of fact, the fame of a celebrity usually impresses the celebrity about himself as well. He too is shot through with human viewpoint, so he's impressed with his press notices. Star personalities, consequently in our day, are viewed as deserving special treatment above that of ordinary mortals.

This idea of the privilege of status is carried over also into spiritual things. If a scientist is a celebrity, and he makes any pronouncement on spiritual things, all the idiots in society hang on every word that he has to say. If he is a significant person in the entertainment world, and he gets up and sings a religious song, and then has some comments, they hang on every word that he has to say. Celebrities are viewed as deserving special attention and also special consideration.

It is a short step from that to the idea that somehow the celebrity also deserves special consideration with God, relative to eternal life and to God's dealing with that person. Human good unfortunately automatically impresses human viewpoint people. So any celebrity that comes along with some human good project readily impresses those who are disoriented to God's thinking.

So this business of being a star personality has a corrosive effect upon a person's thinking and upon a person's soul. Many people in our day have been utterly disoriented to God's thinking simply because they are impressed with some celebrity in our society. However, the fact of the matter is that God is no respecter of persons. So His absolute righteousness and His perfect justice is going to deal equally with all, whether you are a person of fame or whether you are a nonentity.

But I will remind you that hell is going to be filled with a multitude of famous people. Hell is going to be filled with a multitude of celebrities, many of whom you will know by name and you would recognize by sight? That is where most of the celebrities, whether in politics; religion; education; entertainment; or, any place else in our day are going. So snobbery over your fame or your association with celebrities does not cut any ice with God. God is not impressed by the celebrities you know, or the celebrity that you may be. Instead, the grace of God has placed every person on the same level, so that God is ready to save all on the same ground of faith, the non-meritorious act of trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior.

We have been studying here in Philippians this quality of celebrity status, as it has expressed itself in the New Testament church relative to Judaizers. We found that Paul's ancestry was very good in terms of his human background, but that ancestry was no source of salvation for him. The thing that made Paul happy was not who he was. He is going to list for us now (in verses 5 and 6), seven magnificent superiorities that put him head and shoulders above every other Judaizer in all of the New Testament world by far. Though that could be said about him, the thing that made Paul glad was that he was just plain born again. He knew that being born again is what counts, and he was relieved that the grace of God had brought him to eternal life.

There was a value for this superior star position that Paul held in his day, because it enabled him to deal with the Judaizers in a very forceful way, as we shall see in a moment. The gentiles who came into Christianity would very naturally be impressed with these Judaizers. They were the folks who were always in the synagogue when the doors were open. They were the ones who were giving the most money. They were carrying all the different jobs. They were very careful to be very meticulous about all the details of the Mosaic Law relative to their personal lives.

So the gentile who came in out of paganism, seeing this kind of religious zeal and devotion, would very naturally be extremely impressed. The apostle Paul came along and said, "I want to tell you Christians something about these people: they're dogs; they're evil workers; and, they're butchers. Don't have anything to do with them." If it had been anybody less than the apostle Paul, people would have looked at him and said, "Wait a minute. Do you realize what kind of fine Christians you're talking about here? Do you realize how these folks love the Lord? Have you ever listened to one of these people give a testimony? How in the world can you talk about them like that? These are exceptional people. These are outstanding Christians. These are the great men of God."

When was the last time you have heard that tiresome loathsome expression, "The great men of God." There are no great men of God, and there are no great women of God. There are only a bunch of loathsome sinners who are happening, because of the grace of God and the love of God, to make it into heaven. That's all.

The apostle Paul had to have something in his own personal standing and stature to be able to talk like this about the sweet Christians who were pursuing his converts and saying, "Grace is not enough." That's why God took the very fact that Paul was indeed a star personality in Judaism above everybody else, and yet, the star personality was pointing out that he was going to hell all the while that he was a celebrity of Judaism. That's the point here. Paul's legalism gave him a legal righteousness, but it did not give him an imputed righteousness, which is what is required for eternal life.

So he was an ideal apostle to the gentiles. Gentiles, who would be prone to be impressed by Judaizers, could not easily dismiss Paul because he had so much in his own heritage; in his own background; and, in his own performance in Judaism, and could not dismiss this man as being some kind of jealous cat who was badmouthing some very fine people.

In Philippians 3:4, the apostle Paul declares that he has more ground for salvation through legal righteousness (if you could get it that way) than any of those who are opposing his doctrine of grace. The problem is that no one can be saved through ceremonial righteousness. That's legalism. Those seeking salvation through the flesh are going to be certain to miss it. So trusting in your own merit, or in your own fame, for salvation is the kiss of eternal death.

**Paul's Sevenfold Superiorities**

Therefore, to establish this fact, the apostle Paul in verses 5-6 enumerates his sevenfold basis of superiority in legal righteousness. We will look at those now:

1. **Circumcised on the Eighth Day**

He says, "Circumcised the eighth day." Paul was circumcised. The Greek word is "peritome" which means a cutting around. It is the word describing the genuine ritualistic act of circumcision required by the Mosaic Law, in contrast to the concision which was simply performing a mutilation of the flesh. Paul had experienced the genuine ritual of Mosaic circumcision. He had not received the mere mutilation that many of these Judaizers had who were championing the idea of circumcision so heavily. This was the biggest thing that the Judaizers were pushing on the gentile Christians. Somehow, circumcision had caught their fancy. The whole concept of circumcision just engrossed them. They were obsessed with it. Everywhere they went, this was the thing that they promoted above all. So Paul mentions it first of all.

This legalism of the Judaizers was something they were very proud of, but the apostle Paul could also say that he had received this Jewish rite. Furthermore, he says that he had received this, "On the eighth day." The Greek word is "oktaemeros". "Oktaemeros" literally means "an eighth-day person." Paul says, "I was circumcised as an eighth-day person." This is a word which indicates duration, not just an interval of eight days. What he is saying is, "I was circumcised when I was eight days old." This was according to the strict Mosaic regulation. You will find this in Leviticus 12:3. Every baby boy, when he was eight days old, was to be circumcised.

Now, the Greek proselytes who had come into Judaism could not claim this. They were circumcised whenever they were converted to Judaism, most of them at a mature age. The Arabs, who were descended from Ishmael, did not circumcise their boys until the child was 13 years old, as was done in the case of Abraham's son, Ishmael. We have this in Genesis 17:25. Many of the Judaizers who were attacking Paul (who had descended through Ishmael – some of them through the gentile line), therefore, did not even have the authentic Mosaic ritual of circumcision in the same way that Paul did. Paul was, on this account, superior to many of the Judaizers.

Eighth-day circumcision may have had some spiritual significance. You know that the number "7" in the Bible is a perfect number. Therefore, the number "8" signifies a new beginning. Certainly the act of circumcision on the eighth day would have been a fitting time, because it signified the detachment from the energy of the flesh and the confidence from the old sin nature. Symbolically it indicated a new beginning. Medically, we're also told that a baby boy, on his eighth day, comes to a physical condition where the blood coagulates in a maximum way, which would be a critical feature.

So Paul, in his circumcision made with hands, was superior to that of many of his Judaizer critics. So first of all, he could say, "Circumcised the eighth day."

1. **Of the Stock of Israel**

Secondly, he could say, "Of the stock of Israel." The word "of" here is the Greek word "ek," and it means "out of." The word "stock" is the Greek word "genos," and "genos" means "race." So Paul is saying, "I was of the race of "israel" (the Greek word), the race of Israel. This was the racial name for full-blooded Jews. I remind you that this again was a significant point in order to prove that Paul had superiority in Judaism over against his attackers.

You remember that Jacob was given the name Israel, which means "Prince of God," after he had wrestled all night with the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, who was called then "the Angel of Jehovah" at the brook Jabbok. We have this in Genesis 32:28. Up to then, he had been known as Jacob: the supplanter; the sneak; the conniver; or, the deceiver. Now God said, "I'm going to change your name. Henceforth, you will not be known as Jacob and all that that connotes. You will now be known by the name of Israel, the Prince of God."

The line of Jacob, then, you remember, was the line of the promises. First it came to Abraham. These were those basic three promises that we have touched before, relative to a land; to a seed; and, to the new covenant. This was passed on to the son Isaac. Then the line could have gone through Esau, the eldest son of Isaac. However, instead, the line went through Jacob. It was this Jacob whose name was changed to Israel, meaning Prince of God.

The thing that the apostle Paul is pointing out is that his descent is through Jacob. It is through the direct line back to Abraham. The Ishmaelites (the Arab branch) could not claim this. They were descended from Abraham's son, Ishmael. So they could not say, "I am of the race of Israel," as Paul could say. Many of the Judaizers were Arabs in origin. They were Ishmaelites. Secondly, Isaac had the son Esau as well as Jacob, and the line should have gone through Esau, but did not. The Edomites (another branch of the Arab contingent) came through the line of Esau. So the Edomites were not in the line of Israel either. They could not claim to be in that most noble category. However, Paul could say, "I am through the line of Israel. Obviously, not even the gentiles could say that.

So what Paul is saying here is, "Relative to my race, I am not only a Jew, who goes back to Abraham, but I am a Jew who goes back to Abraham through our father, Israel. I am full pure-blooded Jew. When you talk about Jew, you couldn't find anything more Jewish than I, Paul of Tarsus." So Paul was superior in his racial origin to many of those who were attacking him as Judaizers.

1. **Of the Tribe of Benjamin**

Furthermore, he has a third claim to fame, and that is that he was of the tribe of Benjamin. The word "tribe" is the Greek word "phule." "Phule" simply means a group of people who are united by kinship or a clan. He was of the clan of Benjamin. Benjamin was the son of Jacob, and Benjamin, along with Joseph, was the favored son of the patriarch, Jacob. Joseph stood as number one in the father's affections. Second to Joseph was Benjamin. The reason for this was that Benjamin, like Joseph, was the son of Jacob's one true love. Jacob had Leah as a wife, but Leah was not the girl that Jacob really loved. As you remember, his true love was Rachel. Rachel bore two sons: Joseph; and, then Benjamin. We have this in Genesis 35:17-18.

Benjamin was very dear to Jacob, especially after Joseph (Rachel's other son) had been sold into Egyptian slavery by his brothers. When Benjamin was born, his mother had a very terrible time of delivery, and the consequence was that she died. The Bible says, "Just before her soul left her body." Therefore, death took place, and her brainwaves stopped functioning, indicating that she was now dead. The soul had left, and there were no more brain waves coming through. Just before that happened, she looked at this baby boy that she had just given birth to, and she gave him a name. She called him "Benoni," which means son of my sorrow.

Though Jacob was terribly broken up over the death of Rachel, he was also terrifically elated over this son by the one true love of his life, Rachel. So he didn't keep the name Benoni, but he changed it to Benjamin, which is "son of my right hand." To Rachel, he was the son of sorrow, but to Jacob, he was the son of his right hand. It often happens that the youngest son seemed to come into intensely closer relationship to their fathers, especially if there is a series of age differences than the older sons that have gone on. In any case, Benjamin was the son of Jacob's right hand.

As we read the Bible, we find that the tribe which descended from Benjamin was a very significant tribe. It was probably a tribe, in honor, esteem, and significance, second only to the tribe of Judah. The tribe of Benjamin was the warrior tribe. This, interestingly enough, is exactly what Jacob (just before he died in Egypt, as he prophesied concerning each of the sons and the tribes that would descend from them, and the nature of those tribes) predicted that the tribe of Benjamin would be a warrior tribe (Genesis 49:27). Consequently, through Jewish history, we have indicated that the tribe of Benjamin always held the post of honor in the army. As a matter of fact, one of the battle cries of the Israeli army was, "After thee Benjamin." We have this in Judges 5:14 and Hosea 5:8.

It was the tribe of Benjamin that had produced, on one occasion, an elite corps of 700 slingshot experts who could throw a stone, literally, the Bible says, "Within a hair's breath." Now, that is quite an accomplishment – to have 700 men with that accuracy. And all of them were southpaws, incidentally. They were all left-handed. It's always disconcerting to see a left-handed person operating. You don't really notice that they're left-handed at first. Something bothers you about them which is distracting. Then pretty soon, you might catch on to what they're doing – that they're operating with their left hand. That's throwing you off. And in the meantime, they've got you already, before you realize what they're up to. So 700 left-handed slingshot operators were quite a thing to field in the course of a battle.

Of course, as you remember, the first king, King Saul was a Benjamite. He came from this tribe. This was the only other tribe that produced a king (1 Samuel 9:1-2). Benjamin had the honor, as a tribe, in the fact that when the nation came to civil war over the accession to the throne of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, the nation split in two, but Benjamin stayed with Judah. That is, they stood by David's tribe, and did not secede from the nation along with the 10 tribes of the north. So this was to the credit of the tribe of Benjamin (1 Kings 12:21).

After the Babylonian captivity, it was Judah (the kingly tribe) that was firmly joined to Benjamin (the warrior tribe) that formed the base of stability for the restoration of the nation. It was these two tribes that produced (after the Babylonian captivity) the reconstructed nation of Israel.

So Benjamin, constantly, is a tribe of considerably significant honor. Only the tribe of Judah was above Benjamin, because the tribe of Judah was the line through which the Messiah was to come.

Benjamin had its great men. For example, you remember that Mordecai was a Benjamin in the book of Esther.

So Paul was superior to most of his Judaizers. All of them, generally, came from lesser tribes. The gentiles didn't even come from any of the tribes.

1. **A Hebrew of Hebrews**

There is a fourth claim to fame. Paul says: "Not only am I an eighth-day circumcised person; not only do I come through the direct line of Israel through Jacob; and, not only am I of the tribe of Benjamin (a noble tribe among the Jewish people)," but he says, "I'm a Hebrew of the Hebrews." The word "of" is the word "ek," which means "out of." We would translate this as "a Hebrew sprung out of Hebrews." The word "Hebrew" is used in term of the national language of the Jewish people and their culture. The word "Hebrew" identifies them as a nation. It's an identifying mark back to Abraham again. This is because Abraham, the father of the nation, was the first Hebrew. He was the first one to cross the river over from the Tigris Euphrates Valley into the Promised Land.

So the word "Hebrew," among the Jews, was used to distinguish them from the foreigners. When a man was said to be Hebrew, this identified him nationally – not racially, but nationally, it distinguished him from the foreigners. Paul uses the term "Hebrew" to contrast the Jews who had adopted Greek culture and language – the Hellenistic Jews. These were the Jews who, many of whom, couldn't even speak Hebrew. And some of the Judaizers who were chasing Paul could not speak Hebrew. They could only speak Greek. They had been completely Hellenized (Grecianized). They were completely Greek-speaking Jews.

Paul says, "I want to point out to you that I talk Hebrew, and that, though I was born in the dispersion in Tarsus outside of the land of Palestine, I was born into a Hebrew home. When my parents talked to me, they talked to me in Hebrew. I grew up knowing Hebrew, and the lifestyle in our home was Hebrew – not Greek, so I am a Hebrew of pure Hebrew stock." Many of the Judaizers that were opposing Paul could not make such a fine claim. They were not superior in their national origin, but rather they had turned to the alien traditions. So Paul is superior to the Judaizers in his solid, uncompromising background of Hebrew culture and lifestyle. That's the way he was reared.

1. **A Pharisee**

Then he comes to a very significant claim, and that is, he says, "As touching the law, a Pharisee." The word "as touching" is the Greek word "kata," which means "according to," meaning "fitness" or "conformity." We would translate it "in relation to" or "concerning" the law. "The law" is the Greek word "nomos," which is here referring to the Mosaic Law. As for the law, he said that he was a "pharisaios." He was "a Pharisee."

Let's pause and examine exactly what a Pharisee is. It's amazing how much of the bible we can use and not really be clear about. What in the world is a Pharisee? You read a lot about Pharisees in the Bible, and you come out with the distinct impression that these guys are green-eyed monsters who, on every occasion, are to be done in. Now, there is some ground for that, because the Lord Jesus Himself called them some terrible names. He called them "snakes." He called them "sepulchers" – white on the outside, and putrefying with dead flesh on the inside. To oriental minds, those are really horrible kinds of names to be calling a person, and descriptions to be making. So we get the impression that the Pharisees were a bunch of no-good characters.

So let's back up for a moment, and think through for a little bit, who the Pharisees really were. This is because I do want you to understand that they did have some commendable points, and certainly were zealous in certain directions, which is why Paul says, "I want you to know that I belong to the Pharisee party."

The name Pharisee means "the separated one." In other words, they were separatists. This applied specifically to ceremonial matters. They were very meticulous about separating themselves in the details of the Mosaic Law. This was a religious party which arose between the Old the New Testament eras. It arose, in part, as a reaction against the Grecianizing spirit that was overtaking the Jews – this Hellenizing spirit, where the Jews were taking upon themselves the culture of the Greek world, and even forgetting the Jewish language. So they arose in order to separate themselves from that tendency, and also to separate themselves from a great deal of bad conduct; a great deal of immorality on the part of the Hebrews themselves; and, a great deal of carelessness about observing the Mosaic Law. So they were separating themselves unto ceremonial cleanness, and separating themselves unto a strict observance of the Law.

Well, a movement began with the scribes of Israel, and developed (out of the scribes) into the Pharisee party. They were opposed by the Sadducee party. The Sadducees began with the Jewish priests and evolved out of them. The Pharisee party actually became prominent in the days of one of the Maccabean rulers called John Hyrcanus, who ruled 134 B.C. through 104 B.C. John Hyrcanus was not on good terms with the Pharisee party. Actually, they really opposed him. The reason they opposed Hyrcanus was because he was more interested in maintaining political power than carrying out the Mosaic Law. Well after his death, the Pharisees were able finally to come to a position of dominance in the Jewish nation. They became the dominant religious power in Israel, even though the Sadducee party usually provided the high priest, and the high priests would be head of the Sanhedrin. Yet, the power structure within the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jewish people, were Pharisees.

Now, in Paul's day, all of the acts of public worship, prayers, and sacrifices were performed according to the decrees of the Pharisees. When Jesus came on the scene, the Pharisees completely dominated all facets of Jewish life. The Pharisees held absolute sway over the masses. They were even superior to what the king had to say, or to what the high priest had to say.

That's why it was so easy for the Pharisee party to decide, "We want Jesus killed." While the people were ready to reach out toward Christ, and when Pilate presented them the murderous Barabbas as an alternative to the innocent Jesus saying, "I'll free one of them on this high season, which will you take?" And Pilate thought that they would naturally take Jesus. The reason it was so easy for the Pharisees to go to the people and say, "Call for Barabbas" was because when the Pharisees spoke, there was no further discussion. That's how completely the Pharisee party dominated the thinking of the masses of the people. Therefore, when the word got out, "The Pharisees say to choose Barabbas," that was it. All they had to do was put the word out, and it was done.

The Pharisees controlled the synagogues, which naturally controlled the nature of the instruction. They also controlled the schools, which naturally, therefore, controlled the educational system – the minds of the children.

The Pharisees were pro-Roman. As a matter of fact, the Pharisees very strenuously opposed the rebellion, which finally eventuated in the destruction of the nation in 70 A.D. The Pharisees did not like the Herodian rulers. They were glad to see the Herodians off, and they were very happy to see Rome come and rule them directly. So they were pro-Roman and got along very well with the Romans.

The Pharisees, religiously, we must place in the position of being conservative and orthodox. What they did that was wrong is that they added many traditions to the law for the purpose of ensuring legal righteousness. For example, they said, "Here is a principle of law. This is what God says we must do – one of the 613 laws. Therefore, in order to be sure that we do not break this law in any way, we will make a list of secondary rules. These will act as a barrier, and if we create enough of these, and a person is careful not to break these secondary barriers, he will never break the law. He will have perfect legal righteousness.

So the consequence was that they created all of these traditions to surround the principles of the law in order to produce perfect legal righteousness. That is the reason they got in trouble with Jesus Christ. That was the reason they were in conflict with the Lord, because they would take something like the rule of resting on the Sabbath day, and then they would surround it with these secondary traditions, which were so absolutely inane that they even went to the extent of attacking Jesus Christ because he healed a person on the Sabbath day. And thus, as per their traditions, he had broken the law of the Sabbath by working. They noted that his disciples picked grain going through a field one day when they were hungry. They had broken the Sabbath rule because this was one of the hedges of the law. So these hedges were the traditions to secure legal righteousness. What they did, in effect, was that they destroyed the thing they were trying to keep. They lost all the point of the law – the spirit of the law. The meaning of a particular rule was completely gone. All they had was this legal, ritualistic righteousness.

However, they did believe in some very sound doctrine. For example, they believed in the resurrection. The Sadducees did not. The Sadducees were the liberal party, and they were more politically oriented. So the Pharisees were right here. The Pharisees were also very definitive about the fact that there was such a thing as angel beings. The Sadducees did not believe in angels. The Pharisees believed that there were going to be future rewards and punishment for a person. This Sadducees did not. The Pharisees, of course, believed in strict obedience of the Mosaic Law. They were very strict about observing the Sabbath day; the holy days; and, the feast days. They were very rigid on ceremonial purity, and they criticized Jesus and His disciples because they didn't wash their hands before they ate. They didn't go through certain ceremonial purification (again, these hedges) to preserve them from breaking the law.

They believed in the Torah literally. They believed in the inspiration of the Bible. They held the first five books of Moses to be the supreme expression of the mind of God. They believed that God worked in providence in the experiences of men. They also believed that man had a volition to exercise. They were very careful to avoid any contact with the heathen, and even with those who are non-Pharisees that they viewed as sinners. They did this in order to preserve, again, their legal righteousness. This was one of the things on which they did attack Jesus, because he ate with sinners and publicans. The result of this kind of determined desire not to break any of the law with all of these hedges was that the Pharisees found they couldn't do it. It was more than a human being could produce. So what they did was that they became hypocrites. They became very harsh. They became spiritual snobs because obviously they performed a legal righteousness above others.

They were hair splitter on insignificant things. They were cheats; they were fools; and, they were self-righteous. The Pharisees believed that their strict legal righteousness; their strict procedures; and, their hedging of the law would cause the Messiah to return and secure for them entrance into the kingdom of heaven. That's what they wanted to do.

Consequently, Jesus came along and said, "I'm here to bring in the kingdom of heaven – the messianic kingdom on this earth." He promised David's kingdom: "I'm here to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant promises." Then He proceeded to explain what kind of a kingdom this would be and how it would function. The Pharisees said, "This is not the kind of a kingdom we envisioned at all." The result was that they did not want to enter that kind of a kingdom here on this earth. So instead they rejected their Messiah. In other words, their legal righteousness had completely blinded them to the real thing.

So in Paul's day, the Pharisees were very highly regarded by both the Romans and the Jews, and they bore the greatest of influence. So Paul's membership in the Pharisee party gave him a superiority above the Judaizers who had no such standing. Most of them had not been Pharisees, and in the Pharisee party. But Paul was a devoted Pharisee. He was an advocate of the Pharisee position far above his peers. You can read about this in Galatians 1:13-14 and in Acts 26:4-5. No one came close to him, even as a youth. In other words, Paul was not just some Jew sitting on the back row in the synagogue. He was a leader in the Pharisee party. He was an outstanding religious man.

1. **Persecutor of Christians**

Then Paul says that his sixth claim to fame was that he was a zealous persecutor of the Christians: "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church." The word "concerning" is "kata," here this word means "in reference to" or "with respect to." The word zeal is the Greek word "zelos." "Zelos" means "a fervent devotion to something." Paul was a fanatic for the law and for Judaism. This zeal did not stem in him from the fact that he was ambitious. It did not stem in him from the fact that he wanted to come into some fame, nor was he doing it because he was envious of what some other people were doing. In the local church today, we often have people who serve out of envy to compete with other people who are serving.

The apostle Paul was not performing his service on that account. He was very zealous toward the law because he felt this is what pleased God. That's why he was so zealous. This zealousness resulted in his persecuting Christians. The word "persecuting" is "dioko." "Dioko" means "to put to flight" or "to drive away," which is exactly what he was doing to Christians. Its present tense, indicating that he was continually doing this. It's active voice. He chose to do this. It's participle. It's a statement of fact here. Paul was sold on Judaism, so he constantly sought to apply the penalty that Judaism laid on blasphemy. To say that "Jesus Christ is God" was blasphemy. The penalty was death.

Even the Judaizers who were opposing him didn't do this. When they sought to oppose Christians, they only opposed grace Christians. Paul opposed not only grace Christians. He opposed legalistic Christians. He opposed those who were part of the church, the "ekklesia." "Ek" means "out of," and "klesia" means "called," so "ekklesia" means "the called out ones." This word is used of the whole company of believers in the New Testament as the body of Christ, called out of the sinful world unto salvation. It is also used in terms of a single local church representing a portion of that body.

Paul was a ringleader in persecuting the body of Christ. In the death of Stephen, in Acts 7:54 - Acts 8:3, we find that Paul was a ring leader. So Paul was dedicated in zeal in his action for Judaism in a way that was superior to all that of the Judaizer opponents. In other words, none of those who were chasing him and his converts could say, "We have murdered Christians." Whereas the apostle Paul, to his sorrow (at one time, to his great pride), could stand up and say, I have murdered Christians from one end of Palestine to the other. Nobody is better at it than I am." Paul, concerning zeal for the law, was second to none. He showed it by his destruction of Christian.

1. **Blameless in Legal Righteousness**

Finally, he has one more claim to superiority, and that is blameless in legal righteousness: "Touching the righteousness which is the law, blameless." "Touching" is, again, the word "kata." "Kata" means "according to." Righteousness" is the word "dikaiosune" which means a character or a quality of being right or just. The old English word was "rightwiseness," which gives us a very exact meaning of this word. It is doing what is right. Paul is using the word in reference to the 613 rules of the Mosaic Law. That's why he says, "Touching a legal righteousness which is." The word "which is" in the Greek is "en," meaning "within." This is the legal righteousness which you will find within the Mosaic Law. This is a legal righteousness which he has secured.

There is a word left out here in the translation. It's the Greek word "ginomai." "Ginomai" means "to become." It really should be there in the translation. It's aorist, in the past. It's middle, but it has an active meaning. He by choice became this. It's participle – a principle stated. He became something by his personal choice as the result of keeping these laws so carefully and so exactly, and that is the word "blameless:" "amemptos." It means "free from all valid charges." The idea is that Paul could not be blamed by anyone of having failed to observe any of the 613 rules. He was strictly unblamable. He was blameless. That's an impressive achievement. That would be tough for most of us. He was blameless.

Yet this is the same man with this kind of blameless legal righteousness who says he was the worst sinner that ever lived (1 Corinthians 15:9, 1 Timothy 1:12-15). In 1 Timothy, he says he was the chief of sinners. Why? Because, while he had this perfect legal righteousness, he was murdering the body of Christ. So having become blameless in keeping the law, he became a murderer in his legal righteousness. Yet, we must recognize that, here again, Paul was superior to the Judaizers because few of them could declare that they had that kind of a perfect record of legal righteousness.

So on all seven points, the apostle Paul was infinitely superior to the very people who were trying to impose this Mosaic Law of the Judaism system upon Christians. Now, that's quite an impressive record.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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