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Permit #361

Following the upward call through Philipians ...

## Paul's Pedigree

Mankind in general, alienated from God and without hope in this world, look to physical things to enable themselves to have a false confidence. Some pride themselves on being descendants of those who crossed the Atlantic on the *Mayflower*, or whose ancestry included the nobility of Europe. Some feel elevated because of their Lithuanian heritage, or that they are distant relatives of Genghis Khan, or their family was part of the Zulu consolidation, or that they are of the ancient Malay people. But what if that ancestry were of the special lineage

brought into existence by God Himself — the people of Israel? Paul says that Christians are not putting any confidence in the flesh, however. If a person has been "born of God," what does it matter what his physical heritage may have been?

- ▲ **Confidence in the flesh** — The apostle Paul slams his comments into the face of any Jew who was priding himself on his family ancestry. "Beware of the false circumcision," he has just stated, and "we are of the true circumcision," referring to the faithful followers of Christ. We, he emphasizes, "put no confidence in the flesh." But he is going to superadd, "Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh." To destroy the underpinnings of those who would argue against him, he lists his pedigree in these terms, "If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation 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" (Philippians 3:4-6). Small wonder that Saul (later known as Paul), would become the upcoming young man on the Jewish high council! As a Pharisee and a son of Pharisees, he became one of the ranking teachers — a Hebrew of Hebrews, as he put it. No other extant Jew could really compete with that list.

- ▲ **What is of real value** — Following his encounter with the risen Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, the apostle Paul learned what was of real value. Being of the "strictest sect" of the Pharisees, educated under Gamaliel, gave him no real standing in Christ. He found that the careful and religious observance of the feasts and customs of the Law was of no redemptive value before the righteous Judge. And, of course, his persecution of the early church was a serious mark against him rather than commending him. They catapulted him to the top of Jewish society, "but whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Philippians 3:7). He willingly trashed all those points in his pedigree to become a humble servant of Christ. "You are distinguished," he told the Corinthian brethren, "but we [apostles] are without honor." "We have become the scum of the world, the dregs of all things" (1 Corinthians 4:10,13). The real value was not in earthly marks on a peg, but rather in what he called "the sake of Christ," or the cause of Christ.

The apostle Paul willingly laid aside his personal pedigree perks in order to pick up his cross and follow Jesus. That cross and that cause led him into persecution and suffering almost incomprehensible. "More than that," he comments, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). The value of knowing Christ, and the concomitant becoming deeply involved in the lives of thousands who would obey the gospel became far greater than what he could have known as a stern Pharisee and judge on the high council. As a leading exponent of the gospel, and one for whom the love of God had been poured out in his heart, the apostle stands to this day as one who would be worthy of imitation. May we follow him, as he followed Christ!

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