

SATURDAY, MARCH 24

PHILIPPIANS 3:4-9

In ancient Judaism, pedigree was important. The more closely you could trace your ancestry back to one of the original tribes of Israel, the more respectable you were. It was almost as if they believed holiness could be physically inherited.

The apostle Paul had such an impressive pedigree that he said he had more reasons to “put confidence in the flesh” than anyone else. In other words, if holiness could be inherited, Paul inherited a holy fortune. He had the most Hebrew heritage and upbringing a first-century Jew could have hoped for. If anyone was holy by association, it was Paul.

But that wasn’t all. Paul also had the best Jewish education. In his own testimony recorded in Acts 22, Paul states that he was brought up in Jerusalem and studied under Gamaliel, one of the premier teachers of the day, all of which Paul says rendered him “thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors” (v. 3).

Not only did Paul have the pedigree and the education, he had the experience. When it came to ritual holiness, Paul was as Pharisaic as one could hope to be. That means he never ate bacon or shrimp, always washed his hands in the prescribed way, and didn’t contaminate himself with unwashed sinners. In every way imaginable, Paul was the picture of perceived “holiness.”

And yet, Paul says, “whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ . . . I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.” The word “garbage” is actually much too weak of a translation. “Dung” is a little closer to the word Paul actually used. We holiness people would blush if we heard what the word really means.

This same Paul, who tells Timothy that “God saved us and called us to a holy life” (2 Timothy 1:9), also tells us that pedigree, education, and experience are basically irrelevant in comparison to really knowing Christ. Genuine Christian holiness, then, must be something different entirely.

Where do you think Paul found his source of holiness? Take a look at Acts 9 today.