

Fake Boasting (vv. 4-6)

VERSE 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh (καίπερ ἐγὼ

ἔχων πεποιθήσιν καὶ ἐν σαρκί [conj *kai*per although + *pro.nom.m.s. ego* + *pres.act.part.nom.m.s. echo* have + *noun acc.f.s. pepoithesis* confidence + conj *kai* even, also + *prep en* + *noun loc.f.s. sarx* flesh]).

If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more (εἴ τις δοκεῖ

ἄλλος πεποιθέναί ἐν σαρκί, ἐγὼ μᾶλλον [conj *ei* if + *indef.pro.nom.m.s. tis* anyone + *pres.act.ind.3s. dokeo* suppose; “has a mind” + *pro.nom.m.s. allos* “else” + *perf.act.infin. peitho* confidence + *prep en* + *noun loc.f.s. sarx* + *pro.nom.m.s. ego* + *adv.compar. mallon* more; “far more”]):

VERSE 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of

Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee (περιτομῆ ὀκταήμερος, ἐκ

γένους Ἰσραήλ, φυλῆς Βενιαμίν, Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίων, κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος [noun *loc.f.s. peritome* circumcision + *adj.nom.m.s. oktaemeros* on the 8th day + *prep ek* + *noun abl.nt.s. genos* family; nation + *noun gen.m.s. Israel* + *noun abl.f.s. phule* tribe + *noun abl.m.s. Benjamin* + *noun nom.m.s. Hebrew* + *prep ek* + *noun gen.m.p. Hebrew* + *prep kata* + *noun acc.m.s. nomos* law + *noun gen.m.s. Pharisee*]);

VERSE 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is

in the Law, found blameless (κατὰ ζῆλος διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν

ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος [prep *kata* + *noun acc.m.s. zelos* zeal + *pres.act.part.nom.m.s. dioko* pursue; “a persecutor” + *d.a.w/noun acc.f.s. ekklesia* church + *prep kata* + *noun acc.f.s. diakaiosune* + *prep en* + *d.a.w/noun loc.m.s. nomos* law + *aor.dep.part.nom.m.p. ginomai* “found” + *adj.nom.m.s. amemptos* blameless]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 4-6

1. A new polemic begins with v. 4.
2. As far as the syntax is concerned, the opening phrase of v. 4 (literally, though I myself have confidence in the flesh) is linked with “put no confidence in the flesh” of v. 3.
3. V. 4a introduces Paul’s “boasting” detailed in vv. 4b-6.
4. After Paul catalogues his status within his native culture as imagined advantages, he quickly discounts his fleshly advantages as non-assets with respect to securing the approbation of God.
5. The Judaizers who harassed the Philippian church no doubt appealed to their Jewish credentials in support of their theology.
6. Based in this Paul felt compelled to remind the Philippians that his own background was second to none.
7. He forcefully brings this out in v. 4b with the sentence “If anyone else (pro. *allos* e.g., another of the same kind) thinks (1st class condition) *he has* confidence in the flesh, I far more (his boast).”
8. Prior to Paul’s conversion he did indeed take confidence in the flesh—that is, his status within the Jewish world.
9. The term “flesh” is used here in a different way than the common sinful trend of Adam.
10. It refers to those things a human possesses based on genetics and individual striving to accomplish goals.
11. Paul is saying that all of his advantages within the system he flourished in gave him no advantages when it came to achieving true and eternal greatness before God.
12. The seven items set forth in vv. 5-6 fall into two groupings: the first four items describe privileges that Paul acquired simply by virtue of his birth, while the last three focus on his personal choice and ambition to excel.
13. In the first four items there is a logical progression starting with the Jewish law that required all males to be circumcised on the 8th day.
14. This set Paul apart from pagans and those who may have practiced this procedure in an invalid manner.
15. The next is his claim of being “from the nation of Israel” which set him apart from proselytes, that is, from converts to Judaism, sometimes referred to as “second-class.”
16. Since even an Israelite might come from a less distinguished tribe, Paul points out his distinguished Benjamite descent (# 3).
17. Finally (#4) his family could not be accused of having adopted Hellenistic ways—he was “a Hebrew of the Hebrews.”
18. As an adult, Paul continues, he chose a religious lifestyle that left no doubt with regard to his commitments.
19. It is of significance to note that within this list of three achievements this finds a parallel in Gal. 1:13-14, where the Judaizing opposition that forms that background to the letter to the Galatians.
20. “As to the Law, a Pharisee” serves to highlight the particular approach, he chose for his interpretation of the law was that of the Pharisees.
21. This approach, which emphasized the “ancestral traditions” (Gal. 1:14) corresponds to the rabbinic oral law, which was perceived as the one most faithful to Scripture.
22. The Judaizers could not have asked for anything more impressive (cf. Acts 22:3; 23:6; 26:5).

23. Furthermore, Paul demonstrates his sincerity and intensity of his religious commitment by using a phrase of extreme irony, which both condemns and exalts his former self (“as to zeal, a persecutor of the church”).
24. The language of Gal. 1:3 is even more forceful: “I used to persecute the church beyond of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.”
25. Finally (# 7), Paul challenges anyone that could have “checked the record” and found that he was never charged with his peers of violating the externalities of the Law (“as to the righteousness, which is in the Law, found blameless.”).
26. “Found blameless” is too restricted to the Pharisaical code of conduct, and this too is ironic as Paul was anything but “blameless” before God, as he was in a system that interpreted the law as the instrument of salvation rather than a guide to bring men to a realization of their need for a savior.
27. This false sense of righteousness before the Law (and God) was completely overturned by Jesus when He dealt so deftly with the rich young ruler exposing his utter bankruptcy (Mk. 10:17-27).