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W. O. Vaught

Ouachita Baptist University

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PAUL'S PERSONAL TESTIMONY ON GREATNESS

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF HEBREWS
NUMBER 89
HEBREWS 12:3

Dr. W. O. Vaught
Immanuel Baptist Church
Little Rock, Arkansas

The word "for" is from gar. "Consider" is an aorist, middle, imperative of analogizomai. This is a command and it means to think something over very carefully. So on the basis of what we have just learned in this great chapter on the importance of doctrine in the lives of these super grace heroes, we are to think very carefully. The middle voice means that you have to do this thinking for yourself. Next, we have toi auton and it should be translated "such a one" as Jesus Christ. Once you get with doctrine your whole outlook begins to change. You not begin to have a new understanding of life. Once Christ moves into the center of your life, everything changes.

"That endured" is the perfect, active, participle of hupomeno. This is consistency. He gutted it out to the end. This is an intensive perfect and views the action as completed. This is the finished product of all that he did on that cross. We can look at the finished product--salvation--because he stayed with it to the very end. He drank the whole cup. He paid for every sin. He ran to the end of the race and won, and as he crossed the finish line, he shouted, "It is finished." His resurrection, ascension and session is a part of this completed package. He accomplished his objective and he did it perfectly. Hebrews 12:2, the verse we have just finished, is a perfect photograph of this "endurance." He accomplished his objective and he did it perfectly. "Such contradiction" is from antilogia. It means such pressure, such opposition. Next we have hupo and hamartolos and it means by the agency of sinners. "Against himself" means that the whole target of Satan and the unbelieving world was Jesus Christ.

And remember--the one thing that sustained him on that cross was doctrine. The word "lest" is from the words hina and me and it means "In order that you be not." Then we have the word "wearied" and this is an aorist, active, subjunctive of Kamno. It means to be worn out, to be exhausted.

Next we have "and faint" and this is the present, passive, participle of ekluo. It means to receive extreme weariness, the fainting of soul, loss of courage.

Correct translation of this verse

"For let yourself begin thinking about such a person (as Jesus Christ) having endured such opposition by the sinners against himself, in order that you do not become fatigued, fainting, being feeble in your soul."

"Fainting in your soul" is a part of reversionism. We have a study of this in Philippians, so we will turn there now.

PHILIPPIANS 3:3 "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Look at that last phrase "And not having confidence in the flesh."

PHILIPPIANS 3:4 "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:"

But before we study that passage closely, look at the conclusion in verses 7 and 8.

PHILIPPIANS 3:7 "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." This says literally, "But what category of things were gains or advantages to me, these same things I, myself, have counted loss or disadvantage because of occupation with Christ."

PHILIPPIANS 3:8 "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ," This says literally, "I count all these things of human achievement to be loss, for the sake of the surpassing greatness of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord. Because of whom I have forfeited the all things of human celebrityship, and keep on counciling them dung in order that I might gain Christ."

Now this links up with Hebrews 12:3. We are to keep thinking about such an one as Jesus Christ. The more you press the attack, the more Satan begins to look for your weakness. Paul was one of the greatest men in all human history, but he was nobody as compared to Jesus Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 3:4 "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:" The word translated "though" is from kaiper and means "Although."

(The strict Jews were making it hard for Paul. They were following along behind him and were trying to undo what he had done. They were saying, "Now, Paul taught you some good things, but he didn't take you far enough.")

Then Paul says, "I might have" and this is the present, active, participle of echo plus ego and it means; "I, myself, might be having." This is a pictorial present. It means that at one time he reached the peak of self-righteous legalism.

The next word "confidence" is the accusative of pepoithesis and it means the ultimate of confidence. Then we have en and the locative of sarxz and this refers to human standards of celebrityship. So Paul pulls out his former greatness before he was saved and reminds them of who he was. Now throw against this what he said in verse 3, "And have no confidence in the flesh."

Next we have "ei" and the indicative mood and this introduces a first class condition. If, and the statement is true. "If any other man" and it means, "If any other Jew." Next we have "thinketh" and this is the present, active, indicative of dokeo and this means subjective thinking, it means presumption. Then we have "that he hath whereof he might trust" from the perfect, active, indicative of peitho. It means "to have confidence." Then we have the amazing statement--"I more." This is from ego mallon. This is the kind of dogmatic egotism that makes other people hate you. This is a memorial to Paul's celebrityship as an unbeliever and a judaizer.

1. Paul indicated objective confidence in his former status as a hardheaded Jew. He was the worst sinner that ever lived.

2. Paul was established as the top celebrity in the field of self-righteousness of all time. This word about him is in the Bible forever.
3. If salvation or spirituality could have come through Judaism, Paul would have been in heaven as a result of his own works. There was a time when Paul thought he was the most saved-unsaved person ever to have lived. Paul had a real glowing testimony in self-righteousness. I kept the law perfectly. You want to say, "Goody, goody for you, Paul!"
4. If salvation had been accomplished through Judaism, Paul would have been saved as Saul of Tarsus and would have taught salvation by works to the Philippians. But he didn't. Did he teach circumcision for salvation? Did he ever teach keeping the law as the way of salvation? He did not! He said there is one way-- "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

So this verse correctly translated says, "And not having confidence in the flesh, even though I, myself, might be having confidence in the flesh. If any of the same category (Judaizer) assumes to have confidence in the flesh, I more."

Look At The False Perspective Of The Old Standards

1. Paul had the highest rating in Judaism. Paul was tops. A human celebrity from the standard of Judaism.
2. Under the legalism of Judaism, Saul of Tarsus was a great celebrity. He already had made an impact on history as a legalist.
3. The Gentile believers of the early church had already been infiltrated and influenced by Judaism. Judaism was the antithesis of hellenistic culture.
4. Judaism appealed to Gentile believers because it contradicted the Greek way of life and Greek culture.
5. For this reason three groups in the early church were very susceptible to Judaism. The Galatians, the Corinthians, and the Philippians. The Galatians and Corinthians swallowed it hook, line and sinker. The Philippians were headed off at the pass.
6. The people were influenced by legalism because it was new and different. It just seemed to fit in with a new way of life.
7. Paul will list for us the categories of Judaism where he surpassed all the others.

Look At Paul's Ritual Confidence (Prior to his conversion)

1. CIRCUMCISED THE EIGHTH DAY
This is from the word peritome (to cut around). This was his highest type of ritual confidence (The eighth day was the day when the blood had reached the stage where it would coagulate).

This gave him racial superiority. (No such thing as a pure race today.)

Circumcised the eighth day was as close as you could come. (The Gentile Christians were circumcised as adults and this was an embarrassment to them.)

Paul will later on say, "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision." There is no such thing as racial superiority. All problems in all races come from the old sin nature and from mental attitude sins. The solution of the racial problem is the solution of the problem of the old sin nature. This is what Paul said to the Galatians in Galatians 5:6.

2. OF THE STOCK OF ISRAEL.

Ek and genos and it means "Out from the race stock of Israel." If being saved meant race, then Paul would have been saved. He came from the race through which salvation came. But he would later teach "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob demands the new birth. The new birth is the issue and physical birth has nothing to do with it. Grace never looks back at background.

3. OF THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN.

Judah and Benjamin were the two great military tribes. They furnished the first king of Israel, King Saul. (Not Dan or Ephraim or the good time boys of Asher.)

Paul really had an amazing background, but a little later on he will call this dung.

He had royalty--character--loyalty. He was from the tribe of phule of Benjamin.

4. A HEBREW FROM THE HEBREWS.

This was a cultural superiority. This is in contrast to the hellenistic culture that had infiltrated Israel. Hebrew of the Hebrews meant an Orthodox Jew.

5. AS TOUCHING THE LAW, A PHARISEE.

This was his religious confidence. This is where his religious self-confidence came in. Kata nomos means with reference to the law. They had many doctrines with which you and I would agree. This was the great conservative party for 500 years. But they departed from their conservatism because they didn't have doctrine. During the time of the Maccabees, the people were admonished, "Stick with the Pharisees. They have the best character." Later by the time of Christ, they had deteriorated into self-righteousness and crime and shame.

(Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were exceptions.)

PHILIPPIANS 3:6 "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Now before we go on, get a corrected translation beginning with that last phrase in verse three--"And not having confidence in the flesh. Even though I, myself, might be having confidence in the flesh, if anyone of the same category presumes to have confidence in the flesh, I more. Circumcised on the eighth day, from the race of Israel, of the Tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, with reference to the law a Pharisee."

WITH REFERENCE TO ZEAL, PERSECUTING THE CHURCH

This is kata zelos, and it means "With reference to zeal." Then we have a present, active, participle of dioko. It means that all through those years before his conversion, he just kept on persecuting the church. Paul was the greatest persecutor the church ever had. He killed, jailed, and tried to wipe Christians off the earth. He was out to defeat the church any way he could.

AS TOUCHING RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS IN THE LAW--BLAMELESS

The Greek says, "Having become blameless." We have the word ginomai in the aorist tense not found in the English translation. He kept the law just like the rich young ruler did.

So this verse says, "With reference to zeal, persecuting the church. With reference to self-righteousness in the law, having become blameless."

These verses have established for us a super-celebrity by human standards in the field of Judaism.

NOW THE CONTRAST OF THE SUPER GRACE HIGH GROUND FOR THE TRUE BELIEVER.

This little word "But" from alla sets up a contrast between the human celebrityship and a super grace hero.

Next we have hostes and it means "What category of things." The word "were" is the imperfect, active, indicative of eimi. Next we have kerdos in the plural and it means gains.

1. The plural calls attention to the gains of his human celebrityship.
2. The seven gains mentioned above formed the confidence he had in the flesh.
3. These were the things to show what really constituted his superior feeling.
4. All of us carry certain ideas of being superior from our training in the past.
5. This comes out in all societies--athletic celebrities, or musical or in art or music or military or political. Every realm has the people who are celebrities.
6. We are all human and we tend to take successful people and make celebrities out of them.
7. We set up our goals about what a celebrity is and then we attempt to reach that goal.
8. In this struggle we neglect Bible doctrine and this is the main issue for every believer.
9. By taking the high ground of doctrine, we avoid these pitfalls.

Principles.

1. Persistent learning of doctrine carries over into Christian maturity and causes one to distinguish between true and pseudo celebrityship.
2. This orientation to grace is the very first floor of the edification complex.
3. We must come to realize that if people do reach super grace heights, this is a part of their super grace blessings. We can't emulate them. We need to stay with doctrine.

4. Therefore, human standards can all be eliminated by doctrine and then doctrine will set up the true standard for your life.
5. Therefore, doctrine resident in the soul provides a new set of standards.
6. All of Paul's seven standards of former greatness have all been eliminated by grace. Paul used his own experience to illustrate this.
7. Divine attitude and super grace has replaced his human viewpoint.

Then Paul goes on to say, "Then what things were gains to me." The words "to me" come from the dative singular of ego. Paul by human standards holds the world's record for legalism and self-righteousness. Then we have "those" from houtos and it means those seven things. Next we have the perfect, middle, indicative of hegeomai and it means "to conclude, as an expert." When Paul spoke on legalism, he was an expert. He held the world's record in seven realms. But once you are occupied with Christ, all human attainment is as nothing. So Paul says, "I, myself, HAVE CONCLUDED." Then we have the word "loss" from zemia so he sums the seven gains into one loss. And he ends the verse with "because of Christ."

So this verse says--"But what category of things were gains to me, these same things I, myself, have concluded loss because of Christ."

Summary

1. This is the attitude of the believer who is occupied with Christ. So the issue is this--Do I get fame because of my ability or do I allow Christ to live through me?
2. This attitude does not come about by human achievement. (I am not giving an invitation to come forward and give up fame and fortune.) It is just that I am now ready to take in doctrine every day.
3. Let doctrine replace your own effort to be great.
4. If God promotes you, then accept it but don't try to force it on your own.
5. When you know you are on solid doctrinal ground, then you can live a stabilized life.
6. In giving you these blessings, God is glorified and not you.

PHILIPPIANS 3:8 "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." This is one of the most amazing ways to write a sentence we have in the whole New Testament. We have alla--men--oun--ge--hai. So this says, "In fact, more emphatically therefore even." Next we have "I also myself." Now we have the present, middle, indicative of hegeomai. (The expert is speaking again. This isn't pride this time. This is confidence based on doctrine.)

So Paul says, "I conclude as an expert." Next we have "The all things." This means the all things of his human celebrityship. Next we have the present, active, infinitive of eimi plus zemia "To be loss."

Next we have dia and the accusative of the present, active, participle huperecho and it is used here as an adjective and means "surpassing." So we have "For the sake of the surpassing greatness of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

Next we have "Because of whom I have forfeited (really means replacement) the all things." Next we have "And I keep on concluding them as dung." The word is shubalon and it is in the plural. It means a pile of garbage or sewage.

THE DOCTRINE OF DUNG

1. Human excrement or dung is used in the Word of God to portray certain doctrine. In the Bible there are many words used for dung--
ASHPOT--it means pile of dung. (1 Samuel 2:8)
GELEL--from galal in Job 20:7.
DOMEN--Very vulgar use of the word.
PERESH--Literal translation is dung.
2. Dung is used to describe the pseudo standards of the legalist. This is extreme self-righteousness.
3. Dung is used to describe the condition of a nation under the 5th cycle of discipline. (Jeremiah 9:22, 16:4, 25:11, 8:2; Zephaniah 1:17)
4. Dung is used to portray the judgment of the wicked. (Job 20:4-7)
5. Dung was used to intimidate the Jews when the Assyrians were about to take them. (2 Kings 18:27, Isaiah 36:12)
6. Dung is used to describe the interruption of the Jewish Age in Malachi 2:3.
7. It is used to describe the fall of the mighty ones. (Lam. 4:5)
8. Dung is used to describe the uselessness of the reversionist. (Luke 14:34-35)

And the verse ends "That I may gain Christ." This is the aorist, active, subjunctive of kerdaino. This subjunctive means that anyone who will walk this path will gain Christ just like Paul did.