



Bo's Blog

I am enjoying preaching from Paul's letter to the Galatians. Now, I know some people have problems with Paul, especially when he writes about things that reflect the customs of his times (although some of those writings were pretty progressive for his time). But the early church thought that what he had written about the meaning of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection was so important, that they included those writings in the New Testament so that generations of followers could read them.

In this letter, Paul is dealing with a very basic question—How do we define who is a Christian and who isn't? Some Jewish followers of the time believed that anyone who wanted to be a part of the church had to be Jewish, which meant that Gentiles had to convert to Judaism, follow the Law and dietary restrictions, and be circumcised. Paul's insight, even though he was a Pharisee (a religious lawyer), was that being a part of God's covenant community no longer depended on what we did, but rather on what we believed. If we believe that God has acted, in Jesus' death and resurrection, to create a new covenant relationship with us, then we are a Christian.

To be sure, Paul had no problem with Jewish Christians who wanted to continue to obey the Law and dietary restrictions which were a part of the old covenant, and to have their children circumcised, as long as they realized those traditions were no longer necessary for their relationship with God, and as long as they didn't require others to do them. But we human beings seem to have this natural tendency to want to be in control of things, including our relationship with God. Time and again, over the last 2000 years, people have turned to Galatians as a corrective to this behavior, and still do so today.

What this ends up meaning for us is that all of our traditions, doctrines, rituals, and theology aren't what make us Christians. It is simply our faith that does that. And so we can say with Paul that we are no longer Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free—or to put it modern terms we are not liberal or conservative, Catholic or Protestant (or Orthodox), praise service or traditional—but are one in Christ Jesus. We may experience God working in us in different ways. We may bear different fruits as a result of God's Spirit at work in us. We may find that different rituals, ways of praying, or styles of worship are better at helping us to open ourselves up to God's Spirit. But we are still one in that Spirit; one in that Lord.

Shalom,
Bo