

'CHRISTIAN IDENTITY: WHO YOU ARE AFTER GRACE' # 2

I wonder how often we ask ourselves, 'who am I'? Have I changed? Is it even possible to change? For me, such thoughts follow events when I have let Jesus, others and myself down. *How do you, or can you identify with this?* Our main passage this week describes Peter (Jesus' right-hand man) and others, including faithful Barnabas, making a similar mistake, but then leads us deeper into the error.

Read Galatians 2:11-21

Paul's

writing here is considered dense by many, and it may be helpful to read The Message translation if you have it available. It seems Peter had given in to pressure from his peers who had arrived from the 'head' church in Jerusalem. They were promoting that a Jewish heritage plus their following of the Jewish law was a requirement to be a 'proper Christian', thus making Gentile Christians somewhat second class.

We perhaps should pause here to review whether we, as established Christians, make demands or expect other criteria to be met by new Christians, (including the youth)? Can/do/should newcomers expect the same love and respect we afford each other? Is every criterion we set based strictly on the teaching and modelling of Jesus? Nothing more, nothing less?

Paul writes that justification is by faith alone. By God's grace, when we commit to God, turning away from our former life and begin to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, we are justified on the basis of Jesus' achievement of permanently dealing with sin (our sin) on the cross. If we demand any additional criteria, then, as Paul writes, "Christ died for nothing." Christ's victory on the cross was absolutely complete, "Christ died once for all." (see Romans 6:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

Read Philippians 3:3-9

Paul writes,

"it is we who are the circumcision", we are fully brothers and sisters within God's family, the old criteria (pre-Jesus) are no longer relevant or meaningful. By the grace of God, we are given a new identity, "that I may gain Christ and be found in him."

What does Paul mean by "found in him"? Have we somehow lost our individual identity? How does this relate to justification?

"I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ, for whose sake I have lost all things." We turn our backs on former ways and look to Jesus, who becomes the priority; we become Christians first above all things. Those outside Christianity often see this as a negative, sometimes within our own families.

Do you see putting Christ before all things as a source of tension between all the other roles we have, like father/mother, husband/wife, sister/brother? If so, how do you deal with it?

Each one of us has been individually made; made in God's image, deeply loved and valued by God, and individually and specifically purposed by God and for God. There is surely no tension between living out Jesus' teachings and anything else we (in our new identity) want to do. Loving, nurturing, caring for all, especially our loved ones, must be part of God purpose for us. Doing God's will and our duties become one and

Prayer: Father of all mercies, we thank you for the gift of your grace poured lavishly upon us. We thank you for the undramatic faithfulness and quiet witness of those not called to lead, but whose prayer and kindness have been channels of your blessings in Jesus' name. Amen.