

Our Wednesday night Bible Study group is using the book, The 10 Dumbest Things Christians Do, by Mark Atterberry as our discussion starter for this spring sessions. Two of the chapters in the book are of interest to us today and I think Paul would say a hearty “amen” to both of them: *Hopping from Church to Church* and *Fighting Among Ourselves*. Although the church hopping chapter might not be as relevant for the Galatian Christians as the other, there was still the danger of another sect beginning. For me, both of these chapters indicate that we are living in an age of “consumer driven” religion. Every week almost, studies come out telling us what “seekers” are seeking and how the church must adapt if they are to attract these to our churches. I can hear Paul now!

Paul’s concern for the church in Galatia is summed up in those first few words of the 7th verse: “*You were running so well...*” They had made a good start. They were doing well, developing a strong foundation. But then something happened. Maybe someone showed up with a new teaching or someone came with an old one and thought that they should follow it. After all it has been around for generations, why should we change history. If it was good enough for Abraham, then it is good enough for us. Or, perhaps someone raised a doubt. A “what if?”: “What if Paul is wrong?” “What if we do need circumcision?” Just enough of a doubt to make them begin to question the race they are running.

I dislike multiple choice tests. I mean I always find something that could be true in at least two of the choices. What if I gave you a test with a question about daily sunshine with these options:

- a. The sun never shines in MLT
- b. The sun always shines in MLT
- c. The sun occasionally shines in MLT
- d. The sun is a myth

Now, my mind would say there are two possible answers, b or c. Yes, the sun does occasionally shine in MLT where we can see it, but even though it may be covered by the clouds the sun does shine every day in MLT.

This is what was happening in Galatia. Someone was raising doubts about Paul’s teachings. And, they were beginning to second guess their faith. If we take this route, we may have persecution. If we do this one thing, we will avoid persecution. I mean how bad can it be? And, if it stops all this persecution, why not?

We prefer the smooth stretches of water. White water is not an option that we prefer. Well, maybe once in a while for a little excitement, but for the most part we want to keep the waters smooth. Going along with circumcision is only a small thing and in the long run...

We are looking for a religion that fits our needs, or our perceived needs. We like to church shop. Take a little of this and a little of that and make a nice faith of our own. Was this not part of Israel's problem? They would look in their neighbor's field and see better crops. Immediately they would decide that their neighbor must have a better god and they would go after that god. They were looking for the god that provided the most good.

We have friends from Britain who keep telling us that we in America have too many options. They came back from the grocery store. You don't just have orange juice—you have juice options. Too many options! They had counted over a dozen different types of OJ! If we move that over to religion. I mean, look here on this short stretch on 56th Avenue we have five worship opportunities including an Islamic Mosque! If you don't like what is happening here, well there are other options up or down the road.

I began one chapter in my dissertation about the design for a "religious" mall. It would contain four major houses of worship and then have dozens of other options around the mall. It may seem farfetched but I am not sure it is. As we continue in our diversity we are becoming a more and more consumer driven society even in terms of religion and spirituality. In the book I mentioned at the beginning the author tells of a man who goes to one worship service because he likes the singing and music and then gets in his car and rushes down the street to another church where he prefers the preaching! A mall would make that so much easier!

Paul's solution is one that is amazingly simple: we are one in Christ. We need to find a unity that binds us together. It is a simple and yet difficult statement. The church in Galatia was made up of rich and poor, gentile and Jew, slave and free, male and female all now on equal footing. It is easy to see how they could be split into divisions and factions. Each was used to a set life style, teaching style, etc. How do we get these people to just get along!

Remember the situation in Acts 6. There is some discussion over whether everyone is being treated equally, especially some of the widows. The solution was to appoint deacons to oversee the distribution of food, etc. They were chosen to serve that all would have equal access to what was available. To make sure that everyone was getting along!

Paul's warning to the Galatian congregation is that they in danger of devouring one another. We have not changed. The news this week carried articles about whether black and white congregations worship differently. It even examined whether individual black congregations worshipped differently. We are being torn apart by pettiness and discussions over appropriate worship styles while Christ's church suffers. Things have not changed.

The key: unity and love. *"Love your neighbor as you love yourself."* Develop a genuine love for one another. Love as if it were you being loved. Serve as if it were you being served. Look out and build up one another. The

world is more than willing to tear us down; we must be in the business of building one another up.

Go back to a scene in an Upper room. This is a private party, just Jesus and the disciples. They have had a busy day. The preparations have been made. But there are no servants, even though the towel and basin are there—there is no servant to serve. The disciples are willing to sit down and ignore the common courtesies of the day. Finally, one gets up and takes the towel and puts it around his waist and lifts the basin down to the floor. There he kneels before each one and washes their feet. As Jesus finishes he reminds his followers, disciples are not above their master. *“I have set before you an example that you should do as I have done for you...By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:15, 35).*

We were a day late arriving at our destination. A typhoon had delayed us. The wind and rains made it unsafe for us to traverse the trail. Even the next day the route was wet and muddy. Occasionally our sneakers would stay in the muck, not come up with our foot and would have to be dug out before we continued. We arrived at the mountain church, tired and extremely muddy. They knew the journey and were prepared for our arrival. They had gone to the stream, brought back the water, heated it (we were spoiled westerners) and were waiting to wash our legs and feet as we arrived. Then as we rested they took muddy sneakers and socks and washed them and put them out to dry in the sun!

The task to which we have been called is **not to be consumers of but ambassadors for...**to paraphrase President Kennedy, “We need to ask not what the church can do for us but what we can do for the church.” Paul’s words and warning still stand:

The entire law is summed up in the single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be in danger of destroying one another. (Gal. 5:14-15)