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It Makes No Difference
Galatians 3:26-29

I don't even know how many years it's been, but I still remember my parents hosting a dinner for Rodney's entire family and our family, at a restaurant with dancing.

My sister Sharla and Rodney were going to get married.

And my Dad, is a great dancer.

And we assumed that Rodney's family were great dancers too....see...Rodney's family is black.

Funny how you assume things about groups of people isn't it?

They probably assumed we were complete idiots on the dance floor.

It was one of those awkward we stand and sit on one side of the room and they stood and sat around another side of the room until everyone finally ventured out, and the music livened up, the food came out, and eventually we were all having fun and enjoying each others company.

Now I can't even imagine such awkwardness with his family---

we'd just be swapping stories about grandkids and holidays.

We don't give it a second thought that some have different skin color, because it's family.

That's what happens though.

When it's someone else---when it's us vs. them.

When we **assume** something about a group instead of dealing with a person

When it's **those** people.

Then differences, well, they make a big difference.

The Galatian church?

Well, they were dealing with us vs. them.

The Jewish Christians, esp. the legalists,

Considered *those people*, the Gentile Christians to be lesser than because they didn't follow Jewish law.
They thought that in order to be Christian, they really needed to be Jewish first.
They reasoned that God's promises extended only to Jews, so belief in Jesus alone was inadequate.

This was of course in direct contradiction of Paul's message of salvation by *grace through faith* in Jesus Christ.

And of course it was contrary to the life and message of Jesus himself. Jesus spoke about unity time and again, About how it important it was for his believers to love one another, That we might be one, that others would know us by our love for one another. He asked the believers to do it, he prayed to the Father for it.

Paul comes comes right out and says that these supposed differences. Are just that—Gentiles are not 'those people', 'lesser than'. Belief in Jesus is enough. They don't have to become Jews before they become Christian.

But more importantly he says, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. In fact, there is no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, No longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus!

Talk about *shocking*. Can you even imagine someone today saying There is no black or white, male or female, Rich or poor....Republican or Democrat....

It was a *revolutionary* statement for anyone to make, much less Paul—a devout Jewish man of the day!

It's worth sharing again, a common *Greek blessing* of the day...."*thanks that I was born a human being, not a beast, a man not a woman, a Greek, not a barbarian.*"

And a similar ***Jewish morning prayer*** that Paul himself would have recited prior to his conversion: “*Blessed is he that did not make me a Gentile, Blessed is he that did not make me a slave, Blessed is he that did not make me a woman.*”

Doug Heidebrecht, *Direction*, 2005

This was an entirely ***new way*** of thinking for the Galatians.
And it’s a different way of thinking for us, if we’re honest.

One thing that I love about ***our church*** is all our differences.
We have people all over the political spectrum, right to left,
We have all different backgrounds, all ages,
All different kinds of ideas about the ways of the world.
And I love it. I love that we are not a cookie cutter congregation,
That we don’t tell people how they should vote, or act, or believe
Other than to follow Jesus Christ.
Because we are different.

We ***cannot deny*** that we are different.
God made us different, each unique in our own ways,
And God loves diversity. We should love it too!

But, when diversity causes us to put up ***walls***,
And give thanks that we are ***not like ‘those people’***.
Then, that’s a really serious problem.

If we are ***thanking God that we’re not*** Republicans or Democrats,
That we are not men or women, or rich or poor,
That we are not Black or White, or Asian, or Native American,
Then we are denying God’s very own creation!

As Christians, within the church,
We are called out of love to come together ***amidst*** the differences,
Just like the different ***body parts*** make up one body of Christ....
And out of love we become ONE.

We heard it in Jesus’ prayer in John 17,
He prayed that we would love one another so much
That we would be ONE.

That the world would see us as ONE.

Wow, ***does the world see us as ONE?***

Imagine how it looks to nonbelievers when they constantly read about battles and skirmishes in churches!

What do they experience here?

Becoming ONE isn't easy---

Author and theologian **G.K. Chesterton** once wrote in his book, *What's Wrong With the World*, wrote "*The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting, it has been found difficult and left untried.*"

Sometimes we just don't try to see beyond the differences,

To see ourselves as one family.

Sometimes we don't seek **love** above all else.

Partly because these are **not all people** that we would choose.

But hey, you don't choose your biological family either!

But God has brought us together precisely because

we can learn so much from one another and our differences!

The church is like a family where we **learn to love**

despite our differences,

and I think it's the best place to learn about love frankly

because when you learn to love people that are so different from you

and are unrelated to you and you cannot imagine what they could

possibly be thinking....

But you choose to be ONE with them, to love them.....

that's a glimpse of the **love of Jesus Christ**.

Differences are always here.

But by the grace of Jesus Christ we do not have **'them' and us**.

All we have is **US**. All of us together, ONE.

No longer Republican or Democrat, male or female,

Rich or poor, old or young.....

Just Us.....One body of Christ...bound together by love.

It makes no difference who you are...you are One of us.

This is something that makes **Christian faith** so powerful.
The fact that out of love we rise above,
And become ONE.

Remember our PCUSA missionary to Malawi, **Debbie Chase**?
Remember how she spoke about the African ideal of **ubuntu**?
I first heard of ubuntu when I heard Archbishop Desmond Tutu speak at
TU. He spoke of Ubuntu as the South African idea of being truly human,
belonging to one another.

It means that a person is a person **through other people**, never alone.
To say that someone has ubuntu means that person recognizes other
people as people, they know we belong together.
Debbie told us that the idea of ubuntu is also in Malawi—
the people know they belong together and they are better as ONE.

Do we **know we are better as ONE**?

If we are serious about **being ONE**,
If we are serious about differences not making a **difference**,
It really all boils down to one thing....
They will know we are Christians by our what?
By our **love**.

May we love beyond all differences.....love until we are ONE.
Amen.