

Dropping my obsession with "Church"

Written by Calvin Fox

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I have made a major decision. This portion of Paul's letter to the Galatians gives a good context or background for it.

Gal 2:1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. 2 I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

I appreciate what Paul did here. He wanted to be sure that the Gospel which he proclaimed was the same as what the other Apostles preached. He wanted to check out, after 14 years, that he was still in harmony with apostolic doctrine and I seek to do the same. I search the Word independently, but I always check my conclusions, on what I think the Word means, with what the stalwarts of the Faith through the Ages have written before me. I do not want to invent anything new or teach anything which is not "apostolic" or otherwise "run in vain"

4 Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in--who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery-- 5 to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

Like Paul, I have discovered not all who have claimed to be apostolic truly are. There are (and always have been) those among reliable Church "authorities", Teachers and Theologians who are not true to the Faith once for all delivered. Like Paul, I seek to not be influenced by them, except to expose them.

7 ... when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel... just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel ... 8 (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), 9 and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to ...me

Thus Paul was assured as we may be that what he was preaching was the apostolic Gospel. And what was the heart of that Good News? Justification in Christ by grace through faith in Christ alone.

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16 we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. 17 But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Earlier, Paul had written-

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

and those words still apply today!

11 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

I have preached that Gospel for more than 50 years now. But lately I have come to realize, also like Paul, how 14 ... extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers, i.e.- for preserving or restoring the [Church] of old. There have been times over the years when I have been obsessed and dragged down by "Church" and, especially of late, with the many ways I see it forsaking "the traditions of the elders". I realize that my time to effect any change in the way churches do church has passed. I am relinquishing that burden to any others who may want it. With Paul, I can say

15 he ... who called me by his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach [the Gospel] among the Gentiles

My big decision? I have finally left the embattled Episcopal Church after 28 years (on and off). There are many godly, orthodox Christians remaining within it as a faithful witness. I pray for them. I still remain an Anglican, but TEC is no longer my concern, nor is any other church (they all have serious problems). In no way am I minimizing the importance of the institutional church, but

my exclusive concern from here on out, in these latter days of my life, is my original one, given when God called me to Ministry when I was yet a teenager: preaching the apostolic Gospel and teaching the Gospel-centered life that goes with it.

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