

## **“Make the main thing the main thing!”**

On behalf of all the churches in The Trinity Annual Conference, I wish our Bishop and our sister Annual Conferences, agencies and offices a blessed Advent and Christmas season!

Advent and Christmas come toward the end - and thus also the beginning - of a calendar year. As such, I have always found this season to be especially important for reflection and renewed resolve to concentrate on the things that really count. As the popular (and perceptive) saying goes: *The main thing is to make the main thing the main thing.*

But what is “the main thing” as far as God and the Church is concerned?

The apostle Paul gives us his answer to that question when writing to the Galatians. But before I quote his answer, let me highlight something else he wrote that jolted and provoked my reflections. Paul was writing to Jewish readers, and in Galatians 6 verse 15, he stated that *“neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”*

*“Neither circumcision, nor the lack of it, counts for anything.”* Really!??

It is almost impossible for us who are part of a modern church tradition that has never practised circumcision to appreciate how heretical and horrific such a statement must have sounded to the Jewish leaders in Paul’s day. God’s command in the days of Moses was clear: every believing man must be circumcised if he is to be included as part of the family of God. This was a central and undisputed command of God, and anyone who said that circumcision did not “count for anything” would by such teaching prove himself to be a false teacher.

Here are possibly some analogous statements:

“Whether or not one is baptised in the name of Christ doesn’t count for anything!”

“Whether or not you attend church services doesn’t count for anything!”

“Whether or not you ever receive Holy Communion doesn’t count for anything!”

“Whether or not you speak in tongues, or raise your hands in worship, doesn’t count for anything!”

“Whether or not you read the Bible doesn’t count for anything!”

“Whether or not you attend the annual Pink Dot rally doesn’t count for anything!”

“Whether or not you hold joss sticks at a Chinese funeral wake doesn’t count for anything!”

If none of these statements provoke you, then you probably still cannot appreciate how provocative was Paul’s statement about circumcision (or not) to the religious Jews of his day.

But if neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for much, then is there anything that really counts? Is everything just a question of personal preference? Are there no rules or commandments that truly count in the eyes of God?

Here is Paul’s answer. There is one command that really counts. Paul stated it in Galatians 5:14 *For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

He had written the same thing earlier in Galatians 5:6. *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

Paul concludes his letter with a blessing in 6:16 *For all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them. Amen.*

The main thing is the old rule of love and “new creation” (note the last phrase of Galatians 6:15). Can we find new ways to show love and respect in the name of Christ to a neighbor or enemy? May God help us do new acts of love this Advent season and beyond as we unite together **“to make the main thing the main thing.”**

**Prayer:** Lord, save us from taking specific practices and rules that we have found to be important, and imposing them upon everyone else in Your Name. Instead, help us judge all actions according to Your one rule: the rule of love (and respect) for a neighbor in the same way that we hope our neighbor would treat and respect us (Matthew 7:12). We pray this in the name of the One who asked us not only to love our neighbor, but also our enemies. Amen.

On TRAC Together for God's Word, Worship, Welcome, Witness and Wonder

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