

There are some verses in the Bible that the world likes to twist to mean something else than what it says. One that comes to mind right away is Matthew 7, verse 1: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." The world twists that around to mean that you should never speak against anything to anyone, that you should never judge anyone for anything that they do. But it can't mean that, because the Bible commands us to judge evil. So what Jesus is talking about in this verse is not to hypocritically judge someone, to condemn someone else while you're doing the very same thing.

Another verse that comes to mind is 1 John 4, verse 8: "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." And the world twists that around to its ideas of what love is. That love is just accepting people for who they are, no questions asked. You should never say anything bad about anyone, even if they are living in open sin. But that can't be right either, because John goes on to say right in the same passage that this love is seen in God giving us his own Son. That self-sacrificing love that changes us, that transforms us into something new. So no, it's not talking about what the world thinks of love, of approving sin, but rather a Christian love which we see in Jesus.

One more that comes to mind is Acts 4, verse 32, where it says that the Christians "had everything in common." The world twists that around too to communistic and socialistic ideas, saying that you can't have private property. We have to redistribute wealth. And this, they say, proves it, because the early Christians had everything in common. But that can't be right either, because the Christians in those days still had private property. They still had things like fields and houses that belonged to them. So what Luke is talking about here is not what the world thinks, but that they used these possessions in help of others. They didn't say: "It's just mine and mine alone. You can't have it! Stay away from it!" But they said, "I have something that you need, and as a Christian, I'm going to help you by giving it to you." That's what it meant by this verse. So this kind of twisting, distorting what the Bible says, is a very dangerous thing. One that we have to avoid.

But there's another verse in our reading for today that the world also commonly twists. That's Galatians 3, verse 28, which says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." And the world and even some Christians twist this verse to mean that there are no distinctions whatsoever, that there are no differences among us whatsoever. And they use it to justify all kinds of ideas. There are some who will say that there's no differences in society. There's no order in society, because we're all on the same level, because Galatians 3:28. There are some who will say there's no difference between men and women, that we don't have to listen to what the Bible says about marriage or even about men being pastors, because Galatians 3:28. Some even go so far as to say that this supports transgenderism, because there's absolutely no difference between male and female, because Galatians 3:28. So what exactly does this verse mean, then? Is Jesus doing away with all distinctions whatsoever? Or does it mean something else?

To answer those questions, we have to understand what Paul was talking about when he wrote this verse. Because the Galatians had been led astray, Christians, by some false teachers who were called Judaizers. And these Judaizers were telling the Galatians that "you have to keep all of the Old Testament laws." "You have to be circumcised," they said. "You have to keep the

food laws," they said. "Everything that Moses commanded you." In other words, they had to become Jews in order to be saved. If they wanted to go to heaven, the Judaizers said, they needed to live like Jews in order to be Christians.

And one of the results of this false teaching was that it created a great division within the congregation. Now, this is understandable, of course. The Law does divide. The Law does separate us. And on the one hand, that's a very good thing, because it separates us away from the world. We are not like the world. We are different from the world. We have been separated from them, which is good and necessary. Because we don't want to be like the world. If we were like the world, we would be condemned along with the world. But that separation is something that God intended the Law to do.

But on the other hand, the Mosaic Law, all of these ceremonies that Moses commanded, separated them even further, so that Israel was supposed to be totally distinct, totally separate from everywhere else in the world. They were supposed to have nothing to do with anybody else. That was also intentional, though. God wanted them to keep separate. He wanted Israel to be separated from everybody else until Christ came. But he also intended that division to be temporary. Once Christ came, there was no more need for it. It would go away. But the problem was that the Jews and the Judaizers wanted it to be permanent. They wanted that strict separation to go on forever, contrary to God's intention.

We see an example of this in Galatians 2, verse 12, where it says: "Before certain men came from James, Peter was eating with the Gentiles. But when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party." So Peter, in other words, had been eating with non-Jews. He had been eating with these Gentile Christians as he was supposed to do. But as soon as the Judaizers came, he stopped doing it, because he didn't want to look like he was associating with these people. Because he knew that the Judaizers didn't want anything to do with them. Now, Paul calls him out on this hypocrisy, and rightly so, but you see the problem. The Judaizers wanted nothing to do with these non-Jews. They wanted nothing to do with anyone that were not like themselves. And so they told the Galatians: "If you want to be saved, you have to become one of us. You have to live like us. You have to eat like us. You have to do everything that we do, because only living like a Jew will mean that you're going to get in to heaven." And so that was the problem, then, that Paul is writing to correct: this division and this misunderstanding of the Mosaic Law.

So he writes, then, in our passage that the Mosaic Law was never meant to be permanent. Things like circumcision were always meant to be temporary. They were always meant to come to an end. And that strict separation from the world was also meant to come to an end. And to show that, he uses two examples in our reading. The first example is a prison cell. He says that we were imprisoned under the Law until faith came. And this cell that he's talking about is a holding cell. It's not like a cell in a permanent jail. It's somewhere where after you're arrested, you're put into and held until something else happens. Like if you went to trial or something like that. So this holding cell is never meant to be permanent. It is always looking forward to something else. And so the Mosaic Law, he says, is like that cell. Yes, it keeps you away from the world, because you can't go out anymore. But it's only temporary. Soon it will come to an end. Because when Christ comes, then you are going to be set free.

The other example that he uses is a guardian, someone who was supposed to lead a boy back and forth from school. He was supposed to make sure that he got to school. He was supposed to make sure that he got home again. He was supposed to make sure that he does his homework, and so on. Something like a babysitter in our terms, but with a lot more responsibilities. And that guardian was a necessary thing. But once the child is old enough, there's no more need. There's no more need for that guardian, because the child can take care of himself. And Paul says that the Mosaic Law is like this guardian. It kept you out of trouble. It kept you away from the world, but now you're old enough. Now there's no more need, because you have come of age in Jesus Christ.

So in Christ, then, that old division is no longer there. You don't have to become a Jew in order to be saved. Because all, Paul says, are sons of God. All have been baptized into Christ. All are sons of Abraham by faith. All are heirs of the promise, so that there is no Jew or Greek in salvation. There is no slave or free in salvation. There is no male or female in salvation. These distinctions don't matter when it comes to being saved. Because who you are is not the important thing. What matters is that we are all saved by the same faith in Jesus Christ. That's what Paul wants to teach us by this verse.

So does that mean, then, that all distinctions are gone, the way that the world says? Not at all. Being one in Christ doesn't mean that we are no longer Jew or Greek. It doesn't mean that you aren't American or European or African or Asian or whatever you may be. It doesn't mean that you aren't white or black or whatever color you may be. These things are good. This is part of who God has made you to be. And these distinctions, these racial and ethnic distinctions, are going to continue even in heaven. As we hear in Revelation 7, verse 9: "Behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." Who you are is a good thing. But what it means is that no matter what race I am, no matter what ethnicity I may be, I am saved by faith in Christ.

Being one in Christ doesn't mean that we are no longer slave or free, that there is no social distinctions whatsoever. It doesn't mean that there aren't classes. There are still going to be upper-class, middle-class, lower-class. There's still going to be those who rule and those who are ruled. Those things will continue, because that is who God has made you to be. But what it does mean is that no matter my social distinction, no matter where I am in the great scheme of society--on the very top or the very bottom--I am saved by faith in Jesus.

And being one in Christ doesn't mean that we are no longer male or female. It doesn't mean that the differences between a man and a woman don't matter, or that we're somehow interchangeable with one another. And that even doesn't mean that God's will for each sex hasn't changed. What he says about us is still the same. But what it does mean is that whether I am a man or woman, I am saved by faith in Jesus.

These distinctions are good. They're part of who God has made us to be. And they continue. But my salvation does not depend on them. I don't have to be a Jew. I don't have to be free. I don't even have to be a man in order to be saved. All are one in Christ Jesus.

So what does this mean for you, Christians? It means that Galatians 3, verse 28, is good news for each and every one of you. That no matter who you are, Christ has died for you. You don't have to worry about meeting the requirements. You don't have to worry: "Am I going to be good enough?" None of us will ever measure up. But what matters is that in Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith, as Paul says. So come. Come and call on his name, because as Romans 10, verse 13, tells us: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Come and call on him, and you will find the forgiveness of sins.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you that you have given us Jesus Christ to be the Savior of all people. We pray that you would help us always to follow after him, so that we may trust in him for all things. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.