

Paul certainly had to have patience. In many of his writings, you can really feel him smacking his forehead and shaking his head in disbelief of what these new Christians were bickering about as he read another letter from them.

The Galatians were always bickering about the rules. Whether a person needed to be circumcised or not circumcised, how they should prepare their food, and I'm sure whether baseball should have the DH or not have the DH. They seemed to be all about the rules.

Today's headache for poor Paul came from the good people of Corinth. I really get the impression that these people had pretty much worn thin on John, Peter, Paul and some of the other disciples who were trying to get the message of love that Jesus brought us through their thick sculls.

It seems there was lots of bickering about those who were followers of John, those who were followers of Peter, and those who were followers of Paul. The old, my church is better than your church syndrome. Gee, doesn't that have a familiar ring to it!

I'm thinking Paul must have been pretty ticked off when he started writing chapter four. I'm not sure exactly what was going on but you sure get the impression that Corinth was one place that gave our beloved founders of the new faith a royal pain in the rear end.

Paul begins by making a wonderful statement that how other people judge him doesn't amount to squat. He could care less what others think of him. He doesn't even judge himself.

He goes on to say that only God, who knows the darkness of my life as well as the pureness of my heart, can truly judge me. Only when God judges me will my true value be held.

The irony is that these words ring so true in today's world, possibly even more so. How sad it is that after 2000 plus years, we still don't get it.

And when it comes to religion, we are horrible at taking Paul's words to heart.

If you don't go to my church, you aren't right with God.

If your church doesn't have (Name your favorite program)...then it's not working for God.

If your church has this... teaches that... accepts those... shuts out those... advocates this issue... denounces that issue... follows this rule... doesn't care about that rule... well then, your

church just isn't of God.

We are so busy judging each other and our churches that we fail to see the beauty of God's work. He wanted EVERYBODY to get close to him, not just the Baptists (no offense, Baptists – I just picked a name that I could spell). Why can't we embrace the beauty of how he created so many different ways for a diverse people to have the opportunity to get close to his love?

As Paul said earlier, if you want to follow John, Peter, Paul or anyone else, that was fine – as long as Jesus Christ remained the foundation of the church and of our lives, it doesn't matter. If you're comfortable following John, great! But don't be judging those who want to follow Peter as inferior to you.

Now that's the kind of teaching I like to read. What makes our world so exciting and wonderful is that we are so diverse. We have so many different likes and dislikes. We have such a wide range of personalities. This is what separates us from all other animals, for crying out loud.

God must shake his head hearing the way we judge one another so harshly. We try to tell ourselves that our religion is a religion that embraces all people. Boy is that a joke. Some 2000 years down the road and we still don't get it. I would even suggest that we are nowhere close to what God wants us to be.

The message Jesus brought us was a message of love - for God, your neighbor and yourself.

John, Paul, Peter and all the disciples that Jesus sent out into the world to spread the good news understood that message.

God judges us by our hearts. Only the content of the love in your heart will determine the value of the life you had.