



## A Note from the Pastor's Corner

Setting aside my firm belief that Jesus' intent was to start a living, spiritual movement – not to have a new religion formed using his name – I'd like to ask you what religion you are committed to? I suspect most people reading this will say, "I'm a Christian." And if that's what you say about yourself, nobody has any right to dispute that claim.

Without doubt, you and I are very likely to not be in agreement on all matters pertaining to what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Because (I believe) Christianity is a spiritual movement and not a religion, this should be what we expect. Each Christ-follower will be on his or her own unique path. A person's history, relationships, education, understanding, personal connection with God, cultural indoctrination and involvement, and more all work together in positioning them on that unique place on their unique path of spiritual growth (or stagnation).

Now, if Christianity were truly a religion, none of that would matter. All things relating to Jesus would be absolute – cut-and-dried – impersonal. Denominationalism would be a sin. Two thousand years of accepting what the Fourth Gospel records Jesus saying about the Paraklete – the Holy Spirit – as being true would have to be tossed out the window and replaced with a very different explanation. And, it would be easy to determine who is and who is not 'Christian'.

There would be one set of practices, one set of 'truths', and only one set of specific beliefs each person would have to subscribe to. Any deviation would be a sin. Our individual identity, our personhood, would be of no consequence. The claim to having a personal understanding of what scripture might mean to us today as opposed to people 3,000 years ago, or to you personally, would be more than unthinkable. It would probably be grounds for dismissal.

A person who did not "fit in" would be easy to spot. Regardless of what their claim might be, whether or not they were Christian could be determined quite easily by those around them.

But – that is not how it is with Christianity. Sure, there are those who are so certain of themselves, so in love with their own understanding, that they put their entire trust in their own set of claims. For them, there is no room for discussion, no possibility of other viewpoints or understandings – and no room for the Holy Spirit. But such attitudes and positions simply do not square in any way with the life or teaching of Jesus. And I feel sorry for such folk – I truly do – for they are missing out on *so much*, like the richness, the growth, the newness of life, and the freedom from 'right-thinking tyranny' that comes with being nurtured, taught, lead, and enlightened by the Spirit of God working through others.

So, what am I getting at? Well, in the last few weeks, there have been polls conducted by various organizations that indicate a growing number of Americans – the most recent Time Magazine poll says it's now up to 24% – claim that President Obama is a Muslim. Among those making public statements in support of these results is Franklin Graham – son of Billy Graham. Meanwhile, fewer than half believe the President is Christian. There are now demands being made that Mr. Obama produce a baptism certificate.

My question is: "So what?" Under what circumstances is a person's religious conviction or affiliation determined by an opinion poll? I doubt there are anywhere near 24% of Americans who know enough about Islam to enable them to identify a person they have never met as being Muslim. If a person says they're a Christian, that's what they are – even if we have different understandings of what that means. An even more important question is, so what if he *is* a Muslim? (But, keep in mind that our President doesn't pray five times a day, does not fast for Ramadan, eats pork, drinks beer, etc.)

What about you? If you claim to be a Christian, wouldn't that be all that's necessary? If a public opinion poll were conducted about you, what religious tradition would other people say you were affiliated with? Keep in mind, there are some Christians who claim that if another person doesn't embrace the same doctrines that they do – if they don't think theologically the same way – if they don't 'believe' the same way – then that other person couldn't be a Christian. In other words, there may be a fair number of people who would say you are not a Christian. Also keep in mind that there may be some things about the way you live and conduct yourself that don't reflect the person of Jesus.

And my question remains: "So what?"

Grace and peace, Pastor Bud