

René Schlaepfer, January 15 & 16, 2005



## Part 3: Learning to Love Others

### God desires His church to be for all people

Jesus said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers!” Mark 11:17

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,...” Matt. 28:18

### How the early Christians overcame prejudice and learned to love

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” Acts 15:1

#### 1. Get \_\_\_\_\_

So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to ...see the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This made all the brothers very glad. Acts 15:2,3

#### 2. Get \_\_\_\_\_

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done. Acts 15:4

#### 3. Get \_\_\_\_\_

After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them... “God made no distinction between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith.” Acts 15:7

Before Peter could lead \_\_\_\_\_ out of prejudice, he had to deal with \_\_\_\_\_ prejudice (See Acts 10)

Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right.” Acts 10:34-35

James: “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”

“Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.” Acts 15:19,20

#### 4. Get \_\_\_\_\_

It was also Christ’s purpose to end the hatred between the two groups, to make them into one body, and to bring them back to God. Christ did all this with His death on the cross. Eph. 2:16 (NCV)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal. 3:28

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

Unless otherwise noted, all verses from the New International Version

## Daily Meditations

Spend some time each day this week meditating on today’s topic.

### This week’s memory verse:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal. 3:28

### Monday

Look back over the notes and read the verses they contain. Take an honest personal inventory: Are there groups of people in your life that are difficult for you to love with Christ-like love? Who are they?

How did Jesus’ ministry demonstrate a revolutionary intent to reach out to groups marginalized or stereotyped in His culture?

How do you think you can reach out in your own life more intentionally?

Ask God to help you love all people with Christ-like love. Ask Him to show you ways to demonstrate this love.

## Tuesday

Let's connect some dots today by looking briefly at several passages of Scripture...

Read Matthew 8:5-13. The centurion was a hated Roman, unlike the Jews ethnically and religiously. Yet Jesus commends his faith, and in fact teaches that people like him, from all over the world, will be part of His kingdom. Now read Luke 10:30-37. Samaritans were religiously and ethnically different from the Jewish people, marginalized in Jewish society. What point is Jesus making by having a Samaritan be the hero of the story?

Read John 10:16. What do you suppose Jesus meant by this? Why would he want the disciples to know this?

Read Matthew 28:18-20. We pointed out this weekend that the word "nations" is the Greek word *ethne*, meaning "ethnicities" or "people groups". Now that you've looked at a few of the many passages where Jesus emphasizes that His ministry is cross-cultural, why do you suppose the disciples had such a hard time actually putting this into practice? (For years they stayed in Jerusalem ministering almost exclusively to Jews like themselves.)

Why do you suppose it's difficult to this day for people to truly reach out to people different than themselves?

*Pray that God will use us at TLC, in cooperation with other Christ-centered ministries, to reach out to all the people in our own society in effective, God-honoring ways.*

## Wednesday

Read Galatians 3:26-29. Why would this verse have been absolutely revolutionary for people in the first century world to hear? Why is it important for us to hear today?

Favoritism or prejudice does not have to be ethnically oriented-- discrimination can take other forms too. Read James 2:1-9. To you, who are the people with "gold rings"? The rich? The good-looking? The famous or well-connected? The funny?

To you, who are the "poor"? People of a certain ethnicity? School dropouts? Single parents? Those in prison?

How can you step beyond your preferences about the kinds of people you tend to favor and proactively befriend those who are different from you in the name of Christ?

*Spend some time in prayer today examining your heart. Ask God to help your life begin to reflect in increasing ways the "church of all peoples" the Bible repeatedly refers to.*

## Thursday

Read Acts 15:1-19. Throughout the book of Acts, the disciples struggle to with the idea that the gospel is for *all* ethnic groups. This passage, which we explored this past weekend, is the most crucial incident. Some people tried to convince the Gentiles, or non-Jews, that they had to become Jewish first in order to be acceptable Christians. The early church holds a council in Jerusalem to consider the issue. This was a very important crossroads in the history of the church, a meeting that really set the church free to fulfill the Great Commission. What is the opinion of Peter about converts of different racial and religious background (verses 8-11)?

What do Paul and Barnabas tell everyone about (verse 12)?

What is the opinion of James (verses 13-19)?

How can we apply this to our lives today?

*Thank God today that He accepts all of us and saves us by grace, not because of our pedigree or heritage or good works. Rejoice in His grace to you and all others who freely come!*

## Friday

Read Isaiah 56:6-8. When this was written, members of foreign nations who had come to live in Israel had been excluded from worship for several generations. According to these verses, how will God change this?

Read Matthew 21:12-13. From history we know that the moneychangers set up shop in the "Court of the Gentiles", a large plaza in the Temple area designed so Gentiles could have a place to worship and pray. The commerce of the moneychangers and animal merchants effectively squeezed out any opportunities for Gentiles to meet there. What does Jesus have to say about this?

Read John's vision of heaven in Revelation 7:9-10. How does he describe the crowd?

How does this fulfill Isaiah's vision?

This next week is our *Global Outreach Festival*. How has this week's study affected your own heart for missions work?

*Thank God today that He has a heart for all people. Ask Him to make your heart increasingly aligned with His.*

## Saturday

Look over the memory verse and any devotions you may have missed this week. Take time to sit at God's feet and pray. Please pray that our *Global Outreach Festival* and then the *40 Days of Prayer* will be exciting and effective!