



Explosive Impact • Loving a Divided Culture • Acts 10:17-38 • 10/07/2018

Main Point

We must identify and overcome cultural assumptions in our lives that hinder the spread of the gospel.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

How have prejudices changed in our culture in your lifetime?

What evidence of prejudice have you seen lately? Were you surprised by what you saw? Why or why not?

What causes prejudice?

We often choose to connect only with people much like ourselves, whether it's intentional or not. By doing that, we limit our relationships with people whose differences could enrich our lives, and we limit our opportunities to tell people outside the church about Jesus' love for them. Cultural and racial issues may be considered political topics, but for Christians they should also be issues of ministry, missions, and evangelism. This study is important in addressing our assumptions and our need to see people and love people as Christ does.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Peter had been brought up under the Jewish law with its rules about clean and unclean foods and practices. Jews considered the Gentiles as unclean and refused to associate with them. To eat with a Gentile or enter his house was unthinkable. But when God began to move in the heart of a Gentile named Cornelius, Peter's understanding of obedience according to the law would be shaken forever.

| Have a volunteer read Acts 10:17-33.

The passage does not explicitly say so, but one or more of the men sent by Cornelius (v. 7) were likely Gentiles. In verse 23, what did Peter do for these guests? Why is this significant?

We cannot with certainty know how much Peter grasped at the time. However, we can observe his obedience to the Lord. God directed Peter to go downstairs and accompany the men because God Himself had sent them. In the meantime, Peter responded to the Holy Spirit's prompting by inviting these men into the house and gave them lodging, which was not common between Jews and Gentiles. His obedience to God trumped His cultural assumptions.

What did Cornelius's servants say about their master to commend him to Peter? What do you think persuaded Peter to help them?

What are some of the excuses we make when we are challenged to cross a barrier with the gospel?

As the visitors placed Cornelius in the most favorable light possible, they identified his rank in the Italian Regiment (Acts 10:1) and raved about his good reputation with the whole Jewish nation. Hardly nominal in his religious practice, Cornelius had demonstrated a God-fearing lifestyle through his praying and almsgiving (v. 2). Nevertheless, he had not submitted to circumcision and thereby had not fully accepted Judaism. The three men also spoke about the angel's visit with Cornelius, who had instructed the centurion to call on Peter in Joppa to hear a message from him.

Race and immigration issues are at the forefront of our world yet again. How might believers respond if we saw these situations not just as political issues, but as ministry opportunities?

Just like Peter, we should not wait for our feelings to change before we obey God's commands. Obedience comes first. Obedience often requires that we step outside our comfort zones. Changing your behavior and beginning to interact with others in order to seek the best for them is a sign of obedience to Christ. This is easy with people who are very much like us, but it also applies to those whom we do not understand or possibly do not even like.

| Have a volunteer read Acts 10:34-38.

What is significant about Peter's observation that God doesn't show favoritism? What might it look like if God did show favoritism?

What had led some of the Israelites to conclude they were God's favorites? What did Peter explain as the reason God chose the Israelites?

According to verse 35, what makes someone acceptable to God?

Peter expressed his realization that God will accept anybody of any race who fears Him and does righteousness. External criteria—appearance, race, nationality, or social class—did not determine whether or not God would accept an individual. However, Peter was not suggesting that God universally accepts all people on the basis of sincerity or works. Rather, a righteous, God-fearing Gentile was just as acceptable to Him as a righteous, God-fearing Jew through faith in Jesus Christ.

Peter said Jesus is Lord of all (v. 36). How are your cultural assumptions challenged by that truth?

Since Jesus is Lord of all people, all people need Jesus. All of us need Jesus equally, so all of us are equal. However, that does not mean that we are the same. There are some who still need to hear from us the message of the gospel and accept Jesus as Lord.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some particular ways our prejudices and cultural assumptions hinder the spread of the gospel?

How can Christ followers today share the good news of Jesus Christ with people who need to hear in a way that is both true and loving?

How is God preparing you to take the next step in following His calling or joining Him in His work?

Pray

Conclude your class session in prayer, confessing any prejudice and asking God to forgive us. Ask God to give us wisdom to know when He is leading in a new direction, seeking His help to love others as He loves them.

Commentary

| Acts 10:17-38

10:19-20. Whereas an angel had communicated with Cornelius, it was the Holy Spirit who spoke to Peter after the Lord had granted him the vision. Alternation between the Spirit and an angel as communicative agents occurs elsewhere (8:26,29).

10:24. When God moves powerfully in a person's life, one natural response is to call relatives and close friends together to share the experience with them. In this case, it helped to multiply the impact of Peter's radical message of hope.

10:25-26. When Cornelius fell at Peter's feet, and worshiped him, Peter protested that he too was merely a man. The apostles always sought to glorify God, not themselves.

10:28. The vision God gave Peter taught him that cleanliness standards barring Jews from associating with Gentiles had become obsolete. It is hard to overestimate the seismic change this represented for Peter's worldview.

10:33. By saying they had all gathered before God, to hear everything God commanded Peter to say or do, Cornelius showed the childlike openness Jesus asked of His disciples (Lk 18:15-17).

10:34-35. Due to the vision, Peter now understood that God doesn't show favoritism. This does not mean God accepts all people no matter their response to Him or that people who fear Him are acceptable to Him and do not need Christ. Rather, it means that God does not restrict any nation or ethnicity from the offer of salvation.

10:37-41. You know the events indicated that the basic biography of Jesus was widely known by now. It was still necessary, however, that witnesses to Jesus' life fill in any knowledge gaps and call unbelievers to saving faith.

Reading Assignment for next week

Acts 11:19-30