

TUTORIAL
9.11

Viewing others according to truth

This tutorial continues to discuss the area of *Identity*, and looks at the fourth question in that area: 'Are they learning to view others according to truth, and rejecting the divisions, biases and tensions that often define the wider society?'

Galatians 3:27-28: And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

With Christ as the center, you can see how divisions can be avoided. In the verses above, Paul is pointing out the past distinctions that everybody made; Jews not being connected with Gentiles and there being an animosity between one another, or slave and free or even male and female. Being united in Christ means that the divisions that used to exist are no longer there. So let's start living out what he's saying. There's just no end to the ways that we can differentiate ourselves from others but within the church, under God's headship, those things are eliminated.

Last time

we looked at the third question from the WILD outline in the area of Identity, which you might remember was about people understanding the bonds that unite them as part of the Body of Christ. In this tutorial we will discuss the fourth question in the WILD outline in the area of Identity.

Are they learning to view others according to truth, and rejecting the divisions, biases and tensions that often define the wider society?

Greg says that the believers were very tightly bound by intense opposition. Those early days were difficult, but today they miss the unity that came from being distinct in the society:

One of the things that, for me, has been most impressive, and I've never seen it in the West before, was this unit that was so closely knit together by the body of Christ, the true sense of family, the true sense of understanding of what that meant and the true sense of understanding of what persecution was for many of them and to watch them follow Christ in spite of those things. For many of these believers, today when we talk to them, they look back now and actually almost miss the days when they were feeling the persecution because of that unity that comes from persecution, that unity that comes from the world rejecting you and from being identified now as a believer in Jesus Christ. It was very significant to them.

Today, it's actually changed. In their area now, there are many churches and there are many believers. It's hard for them to know somebody that doesn't know a believer. Twenty years ago, they didn't know who Jesus was. Now almost everybody in the region has heard of Jesus and knows who He is. And that's changed the perspective of the church today.

Matt describes how history and current events have shaped identity there and the impact that has had on church planting:

Another challenging factor with this people group is they're reserved and very suspicious of outsiders. In the last ten or fifteen years, the illicit drug trade has become a dominant force in our area which has caused them to become very suspicious and very close to one another as well. And that has been really challenging for us as we've tried to reach as many people as possible, trying to pull them together to teach them God's Word. We found that they are unable to come together and so that's forced us into teaching in the small family groups. And that's slowing the work down considerably.

And even as a number of them have gotten saved and have trusted in Christ, this suspicion and the fear of their own people and of their neighbors is something they wrestle with and hinders them from really fellowshiping together and coming together to this point.

Matt explains more about the challenges to a clear understanding of identity and the impact on the small group of believers there:

When we start to consider these people and how they view themselves, and how God's building His church in their presence, a couple of things are really challenging for them. One is their view of themselves as God's children and their need to come to realize that, in Adam, they're separate from God. And they're not God's children because they're a particular people group, and that's a huge challenge in evangelism to see them submit to the Word of God when the Word of God says they're in Adam, and by being in Adam

they're enemies of God. They're not children of God. They're not children of God; that's the biggest hurdle initially for identity.

And then once they cross the hurdle, they join the body of Christ and because of the context of where they live, they join this body of Christ that is made up of Mexicans and them. And in their worldview, the Mexican is the child of Satan. And so for them to join a group that now has the ethos that we're all children of God because of Christ, means the one who was my enemy is now my brother. And so that's another huge hurdle that we see that they're having to face and one of the challenges of that is the believers are wrestling with whether or not to fellowship with other Christians because their people reject them for being affiliated with the Mexicans.

And so it even hinders their witness to their family because their family doesn't understand the Gospel, all they see is they're now affiliating with the Mexicans. So this concept of identity has got a lot of hurdles around it before they can understand their identity in Christ but also how they're connected to the Mexican population, the Mexican church, but also the fact that they're not Mexican and they haven't stopped being who they are by being connected to Christ. And how can they continue to be a witness to their family who now affiliate them with the Mexicans because they're no longer considered a part of their own people?

Are they increasingly less concerned about perceived differences with brothers and sisters from other cultural sub-groups, and learning to focus on the more fundamental common identity they have as members of Christ's body?

Kaikou describes how the strong clan ties that existed are being replaced among the believers by the ties they have in Christ:

Within the church, there is recognition that a strong identification with the clan system brings division. Because in that system, everyone's efforts go towards helping the clan. But that has changed now because believers see themselves united through Christ's sacrifice and that they are one in Him. And now, there is a love between the believers that ties them together as one.

So the help that they give to others is based on something different now. So now, God's children have learned to help each other, just out of true Christian love, and that draws them together. This has impacted the attitude of our local fellowships when they are planning for large gatherings. It isn't like it was before, with all the clan tensions. Now the believers generously contribute.

We are very grateful to the Lord that we have seen this change in our fundamental attitude. And we want the basis for everything we do now to be that we are God's much-loved children. And because we see ourselves in Christ, we want to live our lives in the light of what He has done for us.

Gebi explains how God's Word has led them to put aside disputes and suspicions and traditional clan and family barriers:

I'll just add to what has been said about the family and the picture that it provides. Before, there were a lot of divisions between families and also within families. Men regularly did not support their wives. And many would even go and live in other villages, away from them for periods of time and there was a great deal of suspicion between husbands and wives. But now, God's Word has taught us that He intends for there to be real companionship in marriage and that the family should be a picture of unity within the Church.

In the past, the clan system created a real bondage for us. But now that we see ourselves as united by the blood of Christ, the clan system doesn't have the hold that it once did. We see ourselves primarily as the body of Christ.

Do they express respect and appreciation for the role of others within the church that is not based on factors like gender, age, education, social status, and wealth?

Clark describes how the church has wrestled with underlying suspicions and some negative aspects of relationships that were ingrained in the society:

People began to believe and the church was born, but a lot of that suspicion was carried right over into the church. And you had family alliances and all of that was, it was pretty much a microcosm of the society. And then you bring into that the sons-in-law and the daughters-in-law, as they marry into families their loyalty is back to their original family. And the relationship between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law is just expected to be terrible. The mother-in-law treats the daughter-in-law as a slave.

And we've seen those barriers both in the larger community but also within families start to break down. Just over the last year, with one of the families we're closest with, I've been in meetings where the mother-in-law will make a statement and be pretty dogmatic about it, and the daughter-in-law will speak up and contradict her mother-in-law and it's almost like lightning is going to strike. But the mother-in-law agreed, "Oh, yeah, that" and they were both beginning to recognize the gifting of one another and being willing to submit to that. And actually for the mother-in-law to listen to the daughter-in-

law, that's been amazing to watch. So it has those tensions, but you're starting to see them disappear. There's still some there but it's getting better.

Phil talks about how it is a healthy sign for a church when its composition reflects the larger society in terms of gender, age, religious background:

One of the things that stuck out to me was when we're talking about that, we're talking about a body of believers whose demographics and whose representation and composition reflects the broader society. So that if you have a group whose composition is skewed, all men, all women, all this, all that, all one or all the other, and it doesn't reflect the society around them, that's something that you're going to say, "Hmm... I'd like to see that adjust and be a little bit closer to the actual composition of the community."

So here, we're figuring it's something in the range of 95% Muslim and about five percent Catholic. It just so happens that the village that we're in happens to be one of those few villages that also has a Catholic church. A lot of villages don't, they just have mosques. So we have lots of mosques and a Catholic church.

And so it's been really good, first of all we're teaching that we're not picking on any particular religion. It's kind of like we're picking on all religions in general. And so it's nice that there's this mixture so you can pull examples from both sides. One of the things that they constantly highlight is the fact that, "Look at us, we're people that didn't get along with each other, that always fought with each other, that didn't agree with different things. And now, here we are united because of who Christ is."

Phil refers to the variety of backgrounds among Jesus' disciples as an example for the identity of disciples in a church-planting situation:

One of the things that we highlighted as we were going through the process was Simon the Zealot as one of Jesus' disciples and Matthew the tax collector. So here are Jesus and His set of disciples and He is inviting people from totally polar opposite ends of the spectrum. The zealots who are fighting, trying to get rid of the Romans and hate everything to do with the Romans, and Matthew who sold himself to the Romans and is a tax collector for the Romans. And so here the Lord is selecting from within His sets of disciples two people from absolutely polar ends of the Jewish spectrum and asking them now to unite.

And what is it that's uniting them? It's not some sort of agreement on this position or that position regarding what to do with the Romans. The thing that united them was now Christ is all. And that's what's

pulling them actually together and being the uniting force in what otherwise would be war with each other and not being able to stand the sight of each other. And so, we would talk about that with these guys and say, "You know that's what we're seeing. We're seeing people from a Muslim background, we're seeing people from different political parties, we're seeing men and women, we're seeing old and young, we're seeing rich and poor, we're seeing all these different guys. The thing that's pulling them together, that's the gravitational force that's at the center that's drawing all these different things in and holding these things that are in different orbits going in different directions. The thing that's the center in all of this is the gravitational pull of who Christ is. It means recognizing I can fellowship with you, not because I like your politics or not because I like your religion, but because you and I both are brothers and sisters in Christ's eyes."

And so we are seeing that rise up the ladder of hierarchy of identity. So you have this identity ladder, and there are certain rungs at the top that are high identity. And where people were at in relation to Isa was not a very high priority. So we're seeing people slowly moving this rung of Christ and who He is higher and higher and higher up the ladder of hierarchy until it's the top rung. And so that's been neat to see these guys being able to take certain rungs that aren't that important anymore and push them further down the ladder as less important because something else is rising in importance in their mind and that's been cool to see that taking place. We're encouraged by that. There's still a long way to go by far but you see movement and that encourages you.

Are they committed to reaching out to everyone, regardless of any ingrained prejudices in the society, so that people from all the different levels and sub-groups have access to God's Word and to the life of the church?

Phil points out that the teaching from the Epistles about the Jew/Gentile divide were truths that proved very relevant to the new church in Mozambique:

As a group of believers, teaching them these days, we're in Romans and Ephesians, which we've done recently. And what strikes me in both of those books is how central the Jew-Gentile message is that Paul is bringing into both of those books. He was trying to take these groups (that hate each other, that can't stand each other, that are at complete enmity with each other, and for whom the other group is just completely worthless) and he was bringing them together and trying to form them into this one group that's tied together by who Christ is.

And what's been really helpful for us as we're going through those books has been looking at identity. We get these guys from these two different religious backgrounds and seeing them come together and seeing them hear that these guys hate each other and here they are being brought together and being told to get along. They are being asked, "Even when your family is upset with you, why are you going and hanging out with those Gentiles, why are you doing this if you're a Jew? And if you're a Gentile then why are you guys hanging out with those Jews and listening to all those Jewish scriptures?" There was still this whole thing where everybody was blaming the Jews. Priscilla and Aquila had to leave because there was so much tension.

So you're talking about these guys, this wasn't some joke of, "Oh we had a little flare up here," they actually had to go. And so there's that sense of these guys with such enmity with each other being brought together and joining together in one group with a different head and a different system of orientation—that must have just been incredible. So as we're teaching through that and talking about that and highlighting that, we're trying to say, "This is what God's doing with you guys now." It might not be as severe as that separation, even some of the things that he says blow my mind, like where he talks about shaking the dust off your feet.

So if you're a Gentile, if you're a Jew and you're leaving Gentile territory and you're coming into the promised land, you're shaking the dust off of your feet because you don't want the contamination of the Gentile-ness to come into the promised land. So here's Jesus saying to these guys, "Shake the dust off your feet." It's like calling them Gentiles and it's like, "Whoa, you're calling us, people of Israel, Gentiles because of rejecting the Messiah?" That's pretty powerful stuff that highlights that with these guys and helps them recognize that identity formation is this huge thing that's taking place in Scripture. Everything from the story to the actual books that we're going through in terms of the epistles, it's just really amazing.

In this tutorial we saw that unity was a result of hearing God's Word. It's what allowed the churches to be able to reach out and to be a great testimony. Paul the Apostle wrote to the Romans and a big part of his intention was to bring unity under Christ.

When the divisions that are in the wider society are brought into the church, it is handicapped from the outset and unable to reach out. Church planters need to aim for a level of maturity that helps the church get past things that have kept them separated in the past and to allow themselves to be tied to each other through Christ.

We need to see areas in our lives that are contrary and the allegiances that we have that are keeping us separated. The Holy Spirit will use His Word to awaken us to see the divisions that are keeping us apart and the Lord will enable us to reach out, as it is critical for us to be united under the Head and to then be able to fulfil the function that He intends the Church to have.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Viewing others according to truth

1. Research the situation in China where there is the Registered (Three-Self) Church, and the House church movement. Include a brief history, and whatever you can find out about the relationship that exists between them today. From your research, share any thoughts or observations you have related to the WILD question in this tutorial.