

TUTORIAL 9.12 God's Representatives

This tutorial continues to discuss the area of *Identity*, and looks at the fifth question in that area: 'Are growing in their understanding of how to appropriately represent the Lord in their current spheres of contact and in others He might lead them to be involved in?'

Romans 12:1: And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

This verse implies that we are to serve with our whole bodies, that we are actually part of the body of Christ with Christ Himself as the head. As servants of the church we're to give ourselves as a living sacrifice. After all, it was our Master who said, "I didn't come to be served; I came to serve," and then he washed the disciples' feet and told us to do the same for each other.

Last time

We looked at the fourth question from the WILD outline in the area of Identity. We discussed people's ability to view others according to Truth rather than based on pre-existing divisions, biases or tensions in the wider society. In this tutorial we will discuss the fifth question in the WILD outline in the area of Identity.

Are they growing in their understanding of how to appropriately represent the Lord in their current spheres of contact and in others He might lead them to be involved in?

Greg describes how the deaf are often marginalized in Siberian society but the church is finding fertile soil among them:

One of the challenges for deaf people is, if you're deaf in Siberia, most likely you have been raised in an orphanage. That is where you have grown up in, that's all you have known all your life. And when you're out of the orphanage at the age of 21, you're on the street. So most of these guys don't have families, don't have connections, and

so how do they survive where most of the guys end up in crime? They end up in some kind of a system that actually provides for them, but also protects them in the society.

The church has actually found a way to become part of that connection. To become an avenue outside that life of crime. So they actually get involved with young kids in the schools. In these orphanages that they work in, they've provided jobs for people. They actually go in and they provide livelihood for guys. Actually through that they are discipling and mentoring people and are using that as a method to bring them into the body of Christ.

Are they wrestling with the practical realities of what it means to be relevant representatives of Christ in their particular contexts?

Kaikou describes how they as communities of believers see themselves in relationship to those who haven't yet come to faith:

In terms of how we see ourselves, our sense of identity, we are very thankful to the Lord that we see major changes in our views. Our understanding of these things plays out when we are travelling. I am talking about when we go out of our traditional area and go to the market in town, for example, or go somewhere else to play sports. So it isn't like we want to separate ourselves from everyone.

Because you can't live like that anyway. We all have to live out in communities and spend time with people who are not yet clear about the truth. Like I said, there has been a huge change in our view of things, and it is related to the life we have in Christ. Our view of these things has radically changed because we see other people involved in things that we previously thought were okay. But now, we don't want to involve ourselves in many things related to that former life. Our thinking has changed and it has to do with our identity. Because now we understand the way that God sees us. Being conscious of that makes us want to live as He wants us to.

Bill explains how the leaders of the young church had to wrestle with understanding their relationship to the community:

One of the things that the elders of the church really struggled with early on was, as they started gaining wisdom in the Scriptures, all the people in the village started coming to them for counsel. They became a very huge burden for the elders because everybody in the community started bringing problems to them.

So we had to sit down with the elders and help them determine what was a community issue, and what was a church issue. The church

issues we tried to keep those for the elders, and then the community issues we tried to let them be dealt with by the village leadership. Now of course when it became believer to believer the elders dealt with that, but there were some unbelievers in the village that were causing problems and the elders ended up trying to solve all that. That was something that we really had to help them work through, determining what was the church issue and what they should push over to the village leadership.

Matt explains the dilemma of young believers as they face being ostracized for their involvement with other believers:

“One of the challenges for the people in our area was that part of their identity involved participating in the cornbeer culture where they make beer out of corn and every event in life that's significant is encapsulated in a cornbeer party. It has to have it. And if you don't make cornbeer on the proper days, you're no longer considered one of the people. And the believers, on their own initiative, stop making cornbeer and stop going to parties, so their families basically say they are no longer part of the group for that and that hinders their ability to be a light and a witness to their families and so these are things we're wrestling with right now. We really are trusting God with this small group of believers to figure this out.

How can they continue to be a light to their families, continue to have opportunities with their families. We have practical conversations with young men who are believers, but who are wrestling with questions of, "If I identify with the church, I no longer have relationships with my cousins and my uncles who I want to reach with Christ, so how do I do that? Do I identify with the church and be rejected, or can I identify with them and then be rejected by the church, but now I'll be a light to my family?" These are the issues that the young believers are wrestling with today as we are working with them.

Is their growing understanding of being God's servants resulting in an expanding view of “the world” as He sees it, and the role they can play in providing access to the Gospel?

John recounts how, after hearing the good news, the people there were immediately burdened for their distant family members:

The young fellow who helped me put the lessons together was Habianna. The day we finished teaching on the ascension of Christ, he said to me, "I'm leaving. I've got to go and tell my mother this story." And I said, "Where's your mother?" And she was days walk away, but he was going to walk for days. And he said to me, "I just hope I can remember it all because it's a long story." But off he went.

He immediately had this burden that others would also know this incredible story, that he had just finished hearing for the first time.

Bill describes how the churches in the isolated people group where they live have begun to consider their responsibility to reach out to other groups:

Where we live, we're very isolated in the people group that we work with that is very isolated too. There are other language groups that border them, but they are pushed quite far away. And of course the language is different, which makes them really isolated from each other. There are multiple churches now in our language group, so that means that those churches border several of the language groups. There are always marriages that happen in between. We have really worked with the churches to try to position themselves in a way that they can actually do ministry. Although I don't think that we've seen a lot of growth in this area, it's something we continue to help them work through and kind of always pointing them towards the needs that are out there.

Over these last couple years we have seen the church where we live look to the different language groups that are bordering them and start asking the question without us pressing them to start asking the question: "What's our responsibility in this and how can we be of help even if it's something small?" They are starting to ask the questions. So we're just hopeful now that as the questions are starting to be asked that the Holy Spirit will also start giving them ideas on how they can bridge that gap that's always been a deterrent for them.

God intends for us as believers to see ourselves in Christ and find security in that. If we are insecure in Christ, then we are unable then to reach out to others. And if we see ourselves in Christ, then it won't make a difference to us whether we are rejected or whether our message is received.

As we wrap up the topic of identity in this tutorial, we see just how crucial it is for us as individual believers. When we are secure in Christ, then we are actually able to be a light to the world. When we are not secure and are reaching out to other things to find satisfaction or to find our identity in, then they become idols to us, and our testimony is hindered. This is important for us to consider for ourselves, as we are wanting to see this in the people that we are reaching. We want them to grow in their understanding of the reality of who Christ is for them.



DISCUSSION POINTS

God's representatives

1. Imagine a small church in what has traditionally been a marginalized minority group (maybe you know of or can research a situation like this). Thinking specifically of identity, what are some of the challenges a group of believers in that situation might face as they seek to reach out to the broader community/culture?
2. Do you agree that the initial identity and roles that a church planter takes on in a new context will have a direct effect on how the group of believers eventually come to see themselves in the community? Please explain your thoughts.
3. In terms of identity, what would you say are some of the factors in a group of believers accepting their responsibility of reaching out with the Gospel as part of the Body of Christ?