



LIFE GROUP SERMON NOTES

“UNITE: United”

Ps. James Lowe - Feb. 22, 2015

WARM-UP (10-15 minutes)

Choose a question below to answer, or ask another. *No right or wrong answers.*

- Were you exposed to any other cultures growing up?
- What culture would like to learn more about, and why?
- What kind of international or ethnic food do you especially like?

WORD (10-15 minutes)

Sermons can be heard online at <http://www.bethelworld.org>

As Christians and church members we must beware lest we live fragmented lives where we live one life of unity in the church and another of division outside the church.

2 Cor 5:17-21 ESV Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

God desires and seeks reconciliation with all peoples, not just those like ourselves.

Acts 17:26-27 ESV And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us...

God desires all people all over the world to seek him out.

Acts 10-11 The Story of the Apostle Peter and Cornelius, the Roman Centurion

Even though Peter and the other apostles had walked closely with Jesus throughout his public ministry and were still intimate with him through the Holy Spirit, they were still afflicted with prejudice. They were willing to suffer for Jesus, yet they wouldn't associate with non-Jews.

In the same way, we can be dedicated followers of Christ and yet still have prejudices in our hearts toward other people. We may dislike certain people groups, or harbor negative sweeping attitudes toward them, or simply be unwilling to closely associate with them.

Peter and the Jewish apostles appear to have been guilty of all these sins. But Christ was determined to purge them of these cultural, religious prejudices. Therefore, Jesus brought about an extraordinary situation whereby he forced Peter to confront these issues.

God will also challenge and confront us to deal with our prejudices in the light of God's magnanimous love revealed when Jesus died on the cross for all people's sins. Jesus died to bring people not only back to God, but to bring them together in unity under Christ, people of every background and ethnicity.

Acts 10:46-48 ESV For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Peter understood correctly the implications of the outpouring of God's Spirit on the non-Jew, Cornelius, and his family. God's acceptance of them meant their inclusion in the church, which in turn meant that Peter and all the Jewish believers were called to community with them. This called for an enormous shift not only in perspective, but also in doing life.

God isn't willing that we simply accept other peoples from a distance, but that we embrace them. Many of the apostle Paul's letters in the Bible deliberately address God's intention that people of every kind of background be brought into community together with each other through their relationship with Jesus.

A Changed Heart, Changed Actions, and A Changed Life

To summarize, God is looking for us to have changed hearts that produce changed actions that result in changed lives. Anything less is not sufficient if we are to be genuine followers of Jesus. It begins with the heart as we are confronted with God's love and truth. By God's grace everyone of us can change. With the help of God's Spirit each of us can grow and become more like Jesus.

PERSONAL APPLICATION (10-15 minutes)

Choose an item below to discuss, or introduce another related topic for discussion.

- Do you go out of your way to reach out to people who are different than yourself, such as your ethnicity, your nationality, your socio-economic background, your age, and your educational level?
- Who are some people different than yourself that are within reach of your life that God would want you to get to know in a greater way? To whom could you bring the message of God's reconciliation?
- How can we become better at building bridges with people different than ourselves?

PRAYER (10-15 minutes)

Pray for any of the following, as well as any other requests you may have.

- That God would overwhelm our hearts with his love, mercy, and compassion for all peoples, and so root out our various prejudices.
- That God will guide us into many good deeds done for the benefit of others who are different from us.
- That God will use us to impact many lives with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the Gospel of reconciliation with God *and* with others.