

Message Main Idea

Because of our sinful nature and the deception of the enemy, the church of every age has neglected Christ's mandate to make disciples of all nations. This is not God's will for the church nor consistent with His love for the world. One of the ways Satan deceives the church is through prejudice. We need God's grace to enlarge our hearts for all people.

Explanation & Discussion

Summary: Peter was lodging in Joppa after raising Dorcas. God began His work in Peter and Cornelius to bring them together for a saving purpose. Cornelius didn't know he needed the gospel, and Peter didn't think he was worthy of the gospel. God used visions, angels, the Spirit, and people to help Peter overcome his prejudice and open the gospel door to the Gentiles.

While we may not be opposed to anyone coming to Christ, practicing biblical evangelism and disciple-making often requires prolonged and personal contact with people we might not be entirely comfortable with. Discuss what situations might be difficult for you.

How do you think our church is doing at reaching those who are marginalized in the community? Why do you think that is? What can we do differently?

Prayerfully consider the possibility that you have un-Christlike feelings and attitudes toward others because of their outward appearance, ethnicity, religion, social circle, politics, or moral choices. Discuss with the group some of your struggles, fears, and concerns when approaching people who are not like you. Pray together for the Lord to make our hearts more like His.

Commit to pray for an unengaged, unreached people group this year. Ask your pastor or mission team to help you identify a UUPG.

Pray that our church would be led to connect with a church-planting missionary to an unreached people group this year.

What are you doing to help your church avoid showing favoritism in its efforts to witness for Christ and bring new members into His church? When visitors come in, do you personally welcome them? What kind of person would you more readily welcome? Who would you more readily ignore? Why?

When you meet someone who obviously disagrees with your Christian values, are you more apt to try to challenge their views or seek opportunities to share Christ? Why is it so hard to get past a person's peripheral issues and focus on Christ?

Are there some groups of people whom you think your church would hesitate to accept as fully participating members? Does accepting certain types of people mean accepting their sins? Why?

Some church growth advocates argue that the church should seek to reach its own kind. What are the perceived benefits of this? How would this affect the growth and maturity of such a church?

What are some of the benefits of short and long-term cross-cultural missions?

Should every Christian be seeking to reach those who are culturally different or is this just the gift of some? How can it benefit us to engage with people that are different than us?

Additional References

James 2:1-4 ¹ My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Galatians 2:11-13 ¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

Jonah 3:10-4:3 ¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. ¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³ Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴ And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

Galatians 3:28 ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

1st Corinthians 9:19-23 ¹⁹ For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

John 7:24 ²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

2nd Corinthians 6:14-16 ¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.

Elisabeth Elliot "God's command 'Go ye, and preach the gospel to every creature' was the categorical imperative. The question of personal safety was wholly irrelevant."

William Carey "Christian multitudes sit at ease and give themselves no concern about the far greater part of their fellow sinners, who to this day, are lost in ignorance and idolatry."

Albert Einstein "What a sad era when it is easier to smash an atom than a prejudice."

Ghandi for a period very seriously considered becoming a Christian. He studied the gospels intensely, and it is reported that he even sold Christian Bibles for a time. In this period, while he was intensely studying the gospel in South Africa, Ghandi heard about a small Christian church in his area, and he decided to attend the church service. But when he arrived, he was stopped at the door by the English elder on duty, who said to him, "Where do you think you're going, kaffir?" ("Kaffir" is a extremely derogatory term for dark-skinned people in South Africa.) Ghandi replied, "I'd like to attend worship here." Then church elder said to him, "There's no room for kaffirs in this church. Get out of here or I'll have my assistants throw you down the steps." Many years later, the missionary Stanley Jones asked Ghandi why he had not become a Christian. Ghandi replied, "I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. They are so unlike your Christ."