



Southwest Indian Ministries Camps

Teen Devotional

January 2023

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OVERVIEW

When the early church preached that salvation was not just for Jews but for Gentiles also, it caused quite the commotion. We may not feel the importance of that distinction today, but there are certainly places where we could learn to be more unified as God's people.

OPENING QUESTION

- Think of some famous rivalries, whether fictional or real-life, modern or historical.
(Examples: Michigan vs. Ohio State. Coke vs. Pepsi. Jets vs. Sharks.)
What makes them rivals?

WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT

It has been well-chronicled that the Jews and the Gentiles had a historically hard time getting along. However, it's hard to grasp how big of a deal that is on this side of history. Let's look at some examples to get a better idea.

The Temple set up reinforced separation. First, consider the temple where the Israelites (God's people) worshiped. The temple was like a circular target, where the holiest things were in the middle, and each outer ring was considered progressively less holy and less worthy. In the center was the holy of holies where only priests were allowed. The next closest section was reserved for Jewish men who met the proper purification standards. Next was the place for Jewish women. The Gentile section? That would be the outer courtyard, as far away from the holy of holies as possible.

God gave Peter a vision. Peter, the first leader of the church, would eventually stand up to defend Gentiles and their place in God's Kingdom. But first God had to speak to Peter through a vision. In the vision, God gave Peter the go-ahead to eat food that Israelites had always deemed "unclean." Minutes later, a Gentile knocked on Peter's door asking about Jesus. Peter obliged but only because God had just shown him that the people who he had always thought to be "unclean" were now a part of God's family. (Acts 10:9-33)

Acts 10:9-33 Peter's Vision

⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

¹⁴ "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

¹⁷ While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸ They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three^[a] men are looking for you. ²⁰ So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

²¹ Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

²² The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." ²³ Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

Peter at Cornelius's House

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. ²⁴ The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶ But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

²⁷ While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸ He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

³⁰ Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me³¹ and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³² Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' ³³ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

Peter's controversial sermon. Finally, watch what happened when Paul shared his testimony with fellow Jews. For most of his speech, which was filled with jaw-dropping stories of God's work, the crowd was deadpanned. However, the minute he said that God had called him to preach to the Gentiles, the crowd lost their minds and tried to kill him. How dare he! (Acts 22:1-24) Starting to get the picture? Now consider the fact that most of you reading this are...Gentiles.

Acts 22:1-24

¹ "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

² When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: ³ "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴ I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵ as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶ "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'

⁸ "'Who are you, Lord?' I asked.

" 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. ⁹ My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

¹⁰ "'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked.

" 'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.'¹¹ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

¹² "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³ He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.

¹⁴ "Then he said: 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. ¹⁵ You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

¹⁷ "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw the Lord speaking to me. 'Quick!' he said. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.'

¹⁹ "'Lord,' I replied, 'these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of your martyr^[a] Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

²¹ "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' "

Paul the Roman Citizen

²² The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"

²³ As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, ²⁴ the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this.

Read Ephesians 2:11–22.

Jew and Gentile Reconciled Through Christ

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)— ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

A SECOND LOOK

The Unity of Music

If you’ve ever been in band or orchestra or lived in a house with someone who is, you know that listening to just one instrument practice a symphony doesn’t give the listener a good idea of how the symphony is supposed to sound. In fact, sometimes it sounds downright weird. That’s because you’re only hearing part of the music. In order to appreciate the whole symphony, you need to hear all of the instruments at once.

Not a fan of the symphony? Think of all the tracks a music producer has to record before he or she can mix the song and get it ready to drop. There’s the beat, guitar, background singers, bass, lead vocalist, and maybe some percussive beeps and bops to give the song some character. Most great songs have multiple tracks layered on top of one another, and none of those tracks sound as good alone as they do when they’re put together well.

This is part of what makes music so fascinating: many different instruments and sounds must work together to make a song great. It takes practice, timing, harmony, and one purpose.

Discuss:

- How is music an example of unity?
- Before any recording or performing takes place, every instrument is tuned to the same pitch.
 - Who should Christ-followers “tune” to so that they are unified with each other?
 - How can different Christ-followers come together to make something beautiful?
- If every Christ-follower was just like you, what would the church be missing

DISCOVER

- What comes to mind when you hear the word “unity”?
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THE BIBLE IN YOUR LIFE

The Ephesian church was made up of mostly Gentiles—people who weren’t Jewish. In the verses preceding today’s passage, Paul wrote definitively about how people are saved through faith in Christ, not by following specific rules or practices. Building on that idea, Paul encouraged the Gentiles that they had the same standing before God that Jewish Christ-followers did, even though they didn’t observe Jewish practices. Paul pointed out that Christ came to end hostility by making all followers of Christ one unified family, no matter their background or culture.

Read Ephesians 2:11–22, then answer the following questions.

Discuss:

- What does this passage say about our state before Jesus intervened?
 - How has Jesus changed the relationship between Jew and Gentile?
 - We may no longer quarrel between Jews and Gentiles, but are there people we do quarrel with within the body of Christ?
 - How have you contributed to hostility toward certain people?
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APPLY IT

Think of someone you know in God’s family who you struggle to get along with. Make a plan for creating unity with that person instead of division this week.

A QUOTE TO THINK ABOUT

“Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other?...So one hundred worshipers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to...strive for closer fellowship.” – A.W. Tozer¹

THE TAKEAWAY

In Christ, we have a unity that is greater than the things that divide us.

“So then you are no longer
strangers and aliens, but you are
fellow citizens with the saints and
members of the household of God,
built on the foundation of the apostles
and prophets, Christ Jesus himself
being the cornerstone.”

EPHESIANS 2:19–20 (ESV)

TOGETHER

ENCOUNTERS

Disciples of Christ are unified
with other believers.

