

FULFILLING CHRIST'S DESIRE

Bible Study Passages & Questions

1. Based on John 17:20-21a, what was Jesus last prayer/desire for all believers in the Upper Room before heading to the Garden of Gethsemane to personally pray?

... I pray also for those who will believe in me...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

Jesus prayed His last public prayer in the Upper Room with his disciples that all subsequent believers would be united.

2. Based on John 17:23b, why was this so important to Him?

... May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Our complete unity gives credibility of the extent of God's love when He sent His Son as a demonstration of His love for all people.

3. Based on the example of what took place in the early church as recorded in Ephesians 2:11-13, what tendency in man keeps us from fulfilling His desire?

...formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision"... remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise....

Throughout the history of mankind, we observe that man, in general, has a tendency to divide, judge others who do things differently than us, look down upon others, separate ourselves, and exclude others from among us.

4. Based on Ephesians 2:14-16, what is one reason for Jesus' death on the cross?

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

One of the purposes of Jesus' death on the cross is explained in the concept of two being made into one, that is the Jews and Gentiles becoming one. This is mentioned twice in this passage for emphasis. Jesus died to end hostility between people who place their culture and their cultural practices before others, using their cultural practices to determine what is normative and what is not, what is acceptable and what is not. Man sees things through cultural lenses and seeks to divide over the differences that they see. As a result, separation takes place, tension rises, and hostility ensues. Jesus died so that we can become one.

5. Based on Genesis 11:1-9, where did culture come from? Why would elevating one's culture be a nonsensical thing to do in light of this passage?

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

This passage tells us that at one time in our human history we were all one people with the same language. The desire to make a name for themselves through the building of a tall tower resulted in God's judgment. As a consequence of their sin of pride, God confused their language and scattered them over the face of the whole earth. People naturally gravitated to people who spoke the same language and in time developed similar practices, mindsets, values, preferences, tastes, etc...in others words, a culture. To elevate one's culture is nonsensical because it is like elevating a consequence of sin.

6. Based on 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, and 20a why should our culture no longer be emphasized? What should be emphasized?

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors...

Our culture belongs to our old nature. We are a new creation in Christ. God has reconciled us through Christ' death. We know that one of his purposes was to create one new man out of the two. This new man transcends all cultures because we no longer represent our culture or our ethnicity. We represent Christ as His ambassadors. We have a new citizenship. Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). We must emphasize what that looks like by adopting: a new mindset, a new value system, a new kingdom government, a new practice that reflects this new heavenly culture that we now represent and are ambassadors of.

7. Based on 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, what role does culture play in ministry?

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

Culture has a place in that we must be effective students of culture using it as a bridge to connect with people of different cultures so that we can earn the right to share with them the good news of Jesus Christ and have the privilege of leading them to faith in Christ. It serves as a bridge to connect us to people who do not know the Lord. Once they have come to trust Christ we must disciple them and help them become mature in their faith moving them to this understanding of being an ambassador for Christ

8. Based on Ephesians 4:1-6, how important is unity in the church?

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Unity is so important that Paul uses emotional words that reflect the intensity of this importance. Words like “I urge you,” “Live a life worthy,” “Make every effort.” Paul also makes his appeal on the basis of several theological truths or disciplines: one body = ecclesiology (study of the church); one Spirit = pneumatology (study of the Holy Spirit); one hope = eschatology (study of the end times); one Lord = (study of Christology); one faith = soteriology (study of salvation); one baptism = sacramentology (study of the sacraments); one God and Father = Theology Proper (Study of the Godhead). This was so important that Paul uses both an emotional and a theological appeal to make his case for unity.

9. Based on Galatians 3:28, to what extent should our oneness extend?

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Our oneness is made possible because of our status in Christ and it should transcend our culture (Jew or Greek), our socio-economic status (slave or free), and our gender (male or female).

10. Based on Ephesians 4:11-13, how can leaders in the church promote greater unity?

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature...

God gave the church the gift of called leaders (pastor/teachers) whose job it is to equip believers for works of service, specifically the service of training believers who can teach others (2 Timothy 2:2) in becoming more united and mature in the faith.

Personal Application

1. What did you learn from this study on fulfilling Christ's desire?
2. How does learning this make a difference in the way you think about unity?
3. What are some threats to the unity of the church?
4. How should we address those threats?
5. How does this study impact your view on culture?
6. Now that you are an ambassador of Christ, a citizen and representative of His kingdom in heaven, how should that affect one's thinking about life here on earth?
7. What should be a critical strategic component of our ministry if we are to maintain unity in the church?