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| Series: All Peoples | Reference: <i>Various Passages</i> | Title: Unity through Immersion | Date: 07.05.2020 |
| Website Writeup: True identity & justice must flow from the throne of God. How do we live out of a Christian worldview and practice issues such as justice in light of God's good authority & direction? | | | |

Let's read some Scripture, beginning with Jeremiah 22:3...*This is what the Lord says: Do what is just & right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.*

Isaiah 56:1...*"Maintain justice & do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand & my righteousness will soon be revealed."*

Isaiah 58:9b-10 in speaking about practicing these things it says...*"If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger & malicious talk,¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry & satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.*

Jeremiah 22:16...*"He defended the cause of the poor & needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the Lord.*

Isaiah 1:15-17 in speaking of the time Israel was not practicing these things it says...*When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood!¹⁶ Wash & make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong.¹⁷ Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.*

Jeremiah 7:5-8...If you really change your ways & your actions & deal with each other justly,⁶ if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow & do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm,⁷ then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever & ever.⁸ But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.

And finally, Micah 6:8...*"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly & to love mercy & to walk humbly with your God."*

Micah 6:8 is a short summary of the other passages & something to which we attain. Although I just read all those verses, this isn't a sermon on justice. It's a sermon on being immersed in the revealed Word of God - total immersion in Christ, finding *unity* in the life & message of Jesus as His Church.

At our last men's retreat we had a pile of dry sponges & a large bowl of water upon entering. We asked all the men to take a sponge & immerse it in the water symbolizing our individual & communal immersion in Christ, His Word & all He embodies together in the spirit of unity. To soak Him up, allowing His life, heart, mind, outlook & character to infiltrate all fibers of our being - distinct individuals making up a collective whole in Jesus.

We instructed them to leave the sponges in the bowl of water for the weekend signifying our unity in Christ. Verses like Micah 6:8 & these others are things we soak up - justice, mercy & humility before our Creator God. These verses are couched as commands, or requirements, not suggestions. We're to reflect these attributes of Christ. I'm sure we're all thinking a lot about these issues given our current social climate. But, how do we reflect these things in this world without compromise & with gentility, living out of a Christian Worldview, walking with Jesus in the power of His Spirit?

All those sponges were of varying size, shape & color - the sponges didn't dissolve melding with all others. They retained their unique color, shape & individuality. Distinct sponges in the same bowl soaked in the same water. Sponges share the same core properties, but vary in color, shape & size. The Human Race is one & the same revealed in varied color, tribe, nation, languages & peoples.

Today we'll look at two passages in Revelation to understand exactly what God's end desire is for all these varied peoples & consequently what our view of others different than us should be. Let's begin at the end in Revelation 5:9-10 & 7:9-10. Referring to Jesus at the end of days, it says...*"You are worthy to take the scroll & to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom & priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."*

⁹After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people & language, standing before the throne & before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes & were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

In light of all the commands of justice & mercy, this image is important to be immersed in. We'll be in that crowd alongside all the other peoples of the world in their wonderful diversity - the image of God's kingdom in its finality. Our future moment, a diverse church of many cultures united under Christ. Imagine being there, it's wonderful.

On this side of that future image, as we seek to evangelize, bringing people into unity in Christ. But we find thoughts & practices within cultures contrary to the message & life of Christ. The question is, what do people keep, change, or throw out from their culture as they come into Christ? Thankfully, as we work towards this, God works in power through the Holy Spirit to convict people of these things. We may have to teach, but it's

the work of the Spirit to convict & move the hearts of people to reflect Jesus. We're just a conduit of the message & partners in ministry.

This image in Revelation informs in so many ways. It gives a lens, a worldview, through which we view all other peoples. It breaks down the negativity of tribalism & speaks of the redeeming Gospel for all peoples. It's a blockade of racism, alluding to the origin of the human race & God's creation of all these people groups in Genesis 11. It gives a sense of solidarity, appreciation & unity with all peoples of the earth. It tells us we're one with the human race in its wonderfully creative color, culture & language. It unifies us without losing the distinctive creative traits.

Most importantly, it tells us who has authority in this process of unification & the only way unity can truly be found. It claims Jesus as the one worthy leader of this diverse kingdom as the perfect sacrifice. The God-Man, incarnate, who loved humanity enough to come into this world to pursue & redeem the human race in all its glorious variety. He lived, died, rose again, conquering sin & death for all the varied peoples, languages, cultures & nations. It gives *all* people equal value, holds all as morally culpable & reestablishes our standing before God by grace through faith in the cross.

Accepting the whole of Scripture as the revelation of God to the human race, we look to the beginning to God as Creator of all things. We see this in the Creation account in the first three chapters of Genesis. Then we look to Genesis 11 seeing how God created all the various peoples of color, culture & language in the account of the Tower of Babel when God created by scattering the human race. As Creator, He defines reality, what a human being is, gender as male & female, what marriage & sexuality mean, the value of humanity in all its diversity & the standards of justice & mercy including how that's practiced, our view on money, how we make decisions, what we do with life & body, how we're to pursue justice & mercy, the call to humility, and finally, our central purpose to bring others under the loving authority of Christ through witness & word.

Yet, without Christ we define our own identities - an unbearable burden. We were never intended to create & manage our own identity - identity is God's gift. It's damaging to individuals & society to place that burden on the shoulders of humanity. When we define it ourselves, compromising on how God created us, we rob people of the wonderful gift of being *authored*. To allow God to author our lives is to live within the freedom of His healthy loving boundaries. When I seek to redefine what sexuality, marriage, or justice mean, to name a few, I create a system, which although looks on the surface to bring freedom, it actually creates new oppression of myself & others. 1 Corinthians 1:25 is true, "*...the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom...*"

Christianity, beginning with the Fall of Adam & Eve, acknowledges life is suffering, we're *all* broken, in need of a savior. But culture tempts us to think, *all* suffering can be alleviated & salvation's found through liberation, or socio-economic betterment alone. Some suffering will be alleviated by these & should, but it won't stop all suffering, and definitely won't save souls. Intellectual blindness in these issues leads us into evil philosophies dressed in tempting terminology. What we find is that it's hard work to be

truly just & good, staying true to the heart & revelation of God. So, we take the easy route, marrying ourselves to systems of thought which afford us the ability, not *really* love the Poor & Oppressed, but simply hate the Rich & Powerful - a compromise on the gospel & true justice. Proof is when the finger pointing & malicious talk begin, as we listen to worthless deceptive words & the new ethnic gnosticism, as Dr. Voddie Baucham calls it, infiltrates the church.

Gnosticism was a special knowledge which only the intellectually superior or enlightened could understand to be saved or morally righteous. It was one of the first heresies of the church rearing its ugly head in various forms throughout history. This new ethnic gnosticism creates a cultural works based righteousness where you have to know & do certain things to be morally right & accepted in society, instead of standing on the Grace of God & mercy of the Gospel. It's characterized in certain terminology, suggesting that if someone doesn't see or understand something in a certain way they're deemed immoral, slapped with a label & risk losing livelihood, or worse. It marginalizes certain peoples to keep them in a cultural prison - there's no forgiveness, nor hope for transformation. It is ongoing punishment for being born as you with no end in sight.

A Christian Worldview dictates Jesus created & came to pursue not just the green, or blue, yellow, or brown sponges, but every one of them. That unification under His kingship is to resist conforming to the false narratives of culture & allow my thinking to be transformed by Christ (Rm 12:1-2). This leads to my words & actions becoming truly beneficial for me & others even when they're socially unpopular. It says all these varied wonderful colors, nations, tribes, languages & peoples are valuable & worth pursuing. Jesus will redeem a remnant of all those who'd be unified in Him. It says that those in Christ are to act out of the heart of God giving honor, respect & to love all peoples as God's creation.

In God's kingdom there's no room for racism, injustice, or looking with disdain on another person, no matter what they've done, who they are, where they're from, or what views they hold. But you know this, I'm preaching to the choir....What you may not be thinking about is that we're all created with a deep desire for belonging, it's built into our spiritual DNA. The Trinity, and Revelation 5 & 7 reflect this. The creation of Eve, as Adam's suitable partner, reflects this when God says, "It's not good for man to be alone." A communal God creating communal people. But belonging brings with it the subtle temptation of compromising the Gospel through social acceptance - conforming to the patterns of this world - following the crowd, although belonging to that crowd forces compromise on our biblical worldview where it brings only more division, assumes wrong intent of others, begins only with distrust, punishes unfairly, fosters hatred, or says we have to do or say certain things to be morally right & accepted.

When belonging isn't found in Christ & His family, we seek it in negative ways. The pull to belong is so strong we begin to trust deceptive worthless words, as Jeremiah warned. Belonging to groups, adopting a worldview which doesn't actually reflect the counsel & character of Jesus, let alone God's true justice among peoples. A worldview only using convenient truths to mask overall deception. We get caught in counterfeit movements,

even of justice, which don't actually flow from the throne of God & don't reflect humility by allowing Him to define life & justice among us.

Exodus 20 is the account of the 10 Commandments. The first says, "*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*"³ "*You shall have no other gods before me.* (Ex 20:2-3)

God's the great liberator - the challenge is to allow His rightful authority in life & justice while acting justly as His people. A lifestyle which doesn't get caught in the weeds of hate, or create new oppressive systems through faulty ideologies. Justice for all peoples under Christ, not just a select few. Because the problem in seeking justice is we can get caught in philosophies, or a worldview which doesn't have God in the drivers seat. Rather, it's driven by imperfect human ideology inevitably hurtful & destructive to peoples, exchanging the oppression of one people group for another. Which means, right now, to be loving, sometimes means to be hated, because it brings a deep disagreement on how justice & issues in society are pursued & worked out.

The interesting thing about the 10 Commandments is, if we break any of 2-10 we automatically break the first. Because, in breaking the others, we put ourselves on the throne of God. Our culture's replete with idols which eclipse God's 1st Commandment. Greed, sex, power & the like. Yet, these labels only mask the root problem, self-elevation to God's throne is the idol all these labels represent. The ancient sin of Adam & Eve, that they knew better than God. So we seek that which we think brings fulfillment & in doing so, as Jeremiah said, we follow other gods to our own harm.

Any ideology, or worldview which doesn't begin with the first commandment, God on the throne, is doomed to failure & brings destruction. If God isn't rightfully enthroned, we make choices which only seem to benefit all, but really only benefit our tribe, again because we're driven to belong. So, it's all too easy to adopt pop-ideologies which make us feel like we belong, especially when so many of the concepts & language bandied about *sound* beneficial & godly, although in reality, they're deeply damaging.

Any system which claims justice, without God as head, is in the end, damaging to the human race. Because human justice often equals tribalism, guarding, or doing what seems right for your tribe - even temporary, or false tribes. Those are the deceptive words we may be following as Jeremiah warns. These humanistic endeavors pit peoples against one another, exchanging oppression of one group for another, filled with pointing fingers & malicious talk as Isaiah stated. We can be better than that, we can be the just, merciful, humble people of God.

Justice is traditionally defined as *giving others what they're due as members of the human race*. Be prayerful & thoughtful as we consider which lens we view the world through. Stay true to the Gospel, seek justice which flows from the throne of Christ & the freeing power of the Gospel in the lives of others. Let the Bible inform us concerning *all* people - to respect, love, honor, care, protect, etc. Remembering, it also makes the claim that sin, shame & dividing walls of hostility can only be dealt with through the Gospel -

in no other way can true identity & peace be found in this world, other than in Christ. Which is why we're consistently called in Scripture to go & make disciples of all peoples, bringing them into God's family, where diversity is valued & unity's found.

Let's keep the 1st Commandment, allowing God to be God, defining who we are in every regard, because even when it doesn't feel right in the eyes of culture, it is what's best for all. Which is faith, trusting God even when His ways contradict culture & the new gnosticism. Pray to avoid the trap of social acceptance on issues & actions which may not truly reflect the heart of God for all peoples. Be a sponge immersed in Christ, allowing Him to define life in every detail & be willing to suffer for the name of Jesus.

This sermon isn't about justice, it's about unity under the revealed Gospel of Christ. Immersing ourselves in Jesus allowing Him to define, through his revealed Word, the Holy Spirits direction & Church agreement, who we are, without conforming to the contradictory philosophies & ideologies of society.

Looking at an uncut cake, we see only the icing & decoration. But icing's held up by the actual cake. If our lives were a cake, would the cake be just the lived experience & ethereal feelings of Jesus & church community, iced over with a few favorite Christian verses & truth statements which we feel an affinity towards? That cake wouldn't hold up. It wouldn't have all the ingredients to make it stand & would never rise in the oven.

Or, we could reverse the image, choosing to build our cake out of the revealed Word of God, the Holy Spirits discernment & wisdom, and in the unity of shared Christian fellowship, with the icing being our feelings & experiences in Christ. There's nothing wrong with the icing, the joys & good feelings we have in Jesus, but they're not the foundation which holds up the cake. We have to build our cake of life out of the Truth of the revealed Word of God, and how He defines the human race & life. When we base it on that, icing tastes best! That life endures & withstands the suffering we face as we walk through life with Jesus!

Let's end with this statement in light of God's creative & perfect authority...We affirm that God, by His will & for His glory, created all nations, scattered us in our sinful pride, and now is regathering us together as one new redeemed humanity through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the redemption, reconciliation & flourishing of all tribes, people groups & languages is a Gospel issue. We deny this world, apart from Christ, can reconcile & unify humanity in our diversity. The Gospel, extended through the Church, is the only means to peace with God & one another.

Community Group Questions

1. Have you ever been convicted in a strong way that your past thinking was faulty & changed it as a result? How did you come to this conclusion?
2. Have you ever stood up for something when it was unpopular?
3. Does the image in Revelation 5 & 7 vv 9-10 excite you? What do you think that would look like, describe your mental image.
4. What are the things in our culture we can **keep** as we come into Christ (which aren't antithetical to the gospel)?
5. What are the things we have to **change** in our culture as we come into Christ (things which may need adjustment)?
6. What are the things we must **throw out** as we come into Christ (things which are antithetical to the Gospel)?
7. *Ethnic Gnosticism* is a term crafted by Dr. Voddie Baucham to explain the phenomenon of people believing that somehow because of one's ethnicity that one is able to know when something or someone is racist. Jason used this a bit more broadly.
 1. Do you understand the concept of this concept? How do you see it working out in our society? What are the terms/phrases which signify it?
 2. Watch Dr. Voddie Baucham in this video, he defines ethnic gnosticism in the first 5 minutes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ip3nV6S_fYU
8. How do we be just, act mercifully & walk humbly with God? What are some practical ways we do this as individual Christians, or as the local Body of Christ?
 1. Think about all the we've done in this community, or in the Middle East through our mission work. What more can we do?
 2. Think about your own personal relationships.
 3. Think about your own personal spiritual formation in Christ - who are you becoming and how?
 4. If you have good ideas on how we as a church can move in these ways in humble uncompromising ways as a church email pastor Jason!