

Pursuing Gospel Community in Our Multi-Ethnic
World: (Acts 10) Image Church
6/3/2018 Pastor Chris Green

Quick Intro

Acts 10:34-43 44-48

34 So Peter opened his mouth and said: **“Truly I understand that God shows NO PARTIALITY, 35** but in **EVERY NATION** anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. **36** As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (**he is Lord of ALL**), **37** you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: **38** how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. **39** And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, **40 but God raised** him on the third day and made him to Appear, **41** not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as

witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. **42** And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. 43 To him all the prophets bear witness that **EVERYONE** who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

44 While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on **ALL** who heard the word. **45** And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out **even on the Gentiles. 46** For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, **47** “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit **just as we have?” 48** And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. **Then they asked him to remain for some days.**

Let’s pray. (We need your **Spirit** to show up now, just like he did for our brothers in Acts...)

Nearly 50 years ago, a great man from Georgia said...

*"I think it is one of the tragedies of our nation, one of the shameful tragedies that 11 o'clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours—if not the most segregated hours—in Christian America."
Martin Luther King Jr.*

Unfortunately, little has changed in the over five decades since Martin Luther King Jr. made this statement. Our **homes** and our **places of worship** are still largely segregated. Question - is this merely a reflection of our context, or is it a reflection of our faith (what we believe)?

Without a doubt, **race & reconciliation** is a conversation that can be hostile and extremely polarizing. Most people would rather not deal with and ignore it altogether... making comments like...*"I don't see color, God is colorblind...look at the children – they don't see color... can't we all just get along."*

God, our Creator, is obviously NOT colorblind and the message of the gospel is NOT either – if the

gospel can engage every area of our lives – it surely can engage this thing we have named "color."

The gospel message has never ignored racial issues. The greatest commandments compel us to love God and our neighbors, and the Great Commission compels us to share the gospel and build lasting relationships with other ethnicities. So yes, this is bigger than a mere race issue for Christians—it's a discipleship obstacle!

John Piper proclaimed "*Missions exists because worship doesn't.*" We can take the same cues as.... racial dysfunction exists where discipleship doesn't.

We should want to see all of God's image bearers redeemed and God's family united.

Our vertical reconciliation to God should directly impact our horizontal relationship with one another.

The Church, Jesus's bride – locally – Image Church possesses the ability to demonstrate this unity, but

we can only live this out by the POWER of the Holy Spirit and through discipleship.

We have the information (good news of the gospel), but what tools do we need to get started?

So...I sought the Lord and said, "*Lord, what can use as a tool from your WORD to examine ourselves as it pertains to this familial GAP in our Churches?*"

And I remembered Peter's account in Acts 10.

From this Account, I want to simply highlight 4 ways to BEGIN the journey of pursuing multi-ethnic community. The first 2 steps on this Spectrum are **INTROSPECTIVE OBSERVATIONS** and the final 2 are **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**.

GOSPEL COMMUNITY SPECTRUM

IGNORANCE

AWARENESS

INTENTIONALITY

GOSPEL COMMUNITY

I will unpack this more in a few.

We have been on a journey at our church for less than 8 years...but along the way we decided this:

Our church should **reflect** the Multi-ethnic make up of our community and we should **declare** the Multi-ethnic make-up of the kingdom.

A. So we see there is BOTH **local** and **universal** component at work here. I want to spend most of our time (just as the scripture does) on the local component...but I will start from the top (if you will)...

1. The Multi-ethnic make up of the **Kingdom** (Revelation 7:9...every nation, tribe, people, & language – on earth we have attempts at it, but it will be for real with the diversity in Heaven – we rejoice when 2 or 3 ethnos come together - LOL) informs us that we are **eternally** what GOD designed – this crushes all the color-blind “language” along the lines of race –...I’m eternally a black man (selah) and God is okay with that...his

concern is how my blackness will revere him now and into eternity – don't forget that a resurrected Jesus walked on the earth for 40 days and he wasn't a glowing, transparent, color blinding angel – he was still a normal looking brown –skinned middle eastern man.... That was what our savior looked like POST RESURRECTION... so the man I preach about, speak about, and value more than anyone else - doesn't look like ANY OF US HERE – so how on earth can WE be base our comfort within OUR own ethnic homogeneity?

- That's why we must DECLARE– your ethnos is valuable to Jesus on Earth AND in Heaven....worship him now with it as a reflection of what we will be doing later together.

- So let's peep into Peter's life as the Holy Spirit begins the hard work of reconciliation in both believers and nonbelievers.

Acts 10 Breakdown

Vs. 1-7 – The VISIT - Cornelius, a roman soldier...very devout man...that God is clearly doing a work in, but still hasn't quite placed his trust in Jesus (how can they hear without a preacher, right?)...so an Angel rolls up on him and is likeNelly! And Cornelius said...*man it's getting hot in here*....then the Angel said – God has heard your prayers...but I need you to send some of your boys to Joppa to speak to Peter...he will be chillin' at a house by the sea.

- NOTE: NEVER UNDERMINE THAT GOD IS DOING A WORK IN THOSE AROUND US (Nelly's out there)...NEVER FORGET WE ARE HIS **PLAN A** FOR REACHING THEM –the harvest is plentiful, it's the workers that are few (Disciple Makers) -THE LOCAL CHURCH....the SENT ONES.

Vs. 9-16 (Peter's Vision)

Peter goes up to pray & he is hungry (never pray on an empty stomach...you loose focus)....and Peter has a vision of a giant blanket coming down with all kinds of animals he just doesn't eat...like a ginormous pig in the blanket...God says EAT...Peter

is like no way – that’s not in our Jewish diet...then God says...**What I made clean, do not call common....**and one time is never good enough for Peter so God does it 3 times (gethsemane crucifixion, & post resurrection) and Peter is **perplexed** by the meaning....

Let’s Pause there for a moment...

Here we have the first tier on the spectrum (examine your heart):

- **IGNORANCE:** Generalized presuppositions of others based on myths & stereotypes, Isolation from people of different backgrounds, and Complacency and Comfort within familiar circles.

Why is Peter having such a hard time understanding something that Jesus was so passionate about?

First, he’s comfortable....as most of us are with the issues of race and reconciliation...we have defined peace as the absence of conflict....you know like **Cease Fire**.... us and North Korea right now – as long as you keep your nukes over there, we will

keep our nukes to us (that’s not peace)....but God didn’t call us to have “*cease fire faith*” – he is busy about making his enemies, his family.[i] We all were his enemies and we were all adopted by his Spirit to be part of the family (Romans 8:15).

Secondly, Peter is simply ignoring Jesus’ passion for the nations/gentiles.

Do you remember in Matthew 21, when Jesus turned over the tables and chased the money changers out of the temple–**WHAT was he so passionate about?**

- This issue wasn’t with money-changers – it was common for people to exchange money for animals to sacrifice.....the problem was **WHERE** this happened in the TEMPLE.
- It was the section in the temple, where Gentiles could come and seek the Lord - but it was reduced to selfish opportunists and pigeon dung.
- Jesus then \quotes **Isaiah 56** and **Jeremiah 7** in part...when he says, “for my house shall be a house of prayer (for **all**

nations/ethnos/ethnicities), but you have made it a den of robbers.

- I love Isaiah 56 – in verse 3 of the that chapter before this – it reads....*“Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely **separate** me from his people; (foreshadowing here....for Cornelius the foreigner and US now)*

Basically, if the foreigner experiences **vertical** reconciliation with **God**, how on earth will he not experience **horizontal** reconciliation with the rest of **God’s people**? **How can there NOT be UNITY?**

*We are ignoring God’s Word if people that don’t look like us are only worth to be preached at not invited into our community of faith – WE MUST TO CONFESS OUR IGNORANCE...And the perplexity of our ignorance (just like Peter) drive us to self – awareness.

Secondly we observe the next tier in the Spectrum:

- **AWARENESS:** Genuine concern about the issues others face. Desire to learn more

about others interests & perspectives of others. Appreciation and Value placed on others.

Peter was IGNORANT, but God **BY HIS SPIRIT** made him AWARE through the vision – that God made them (the Gentiles clean).... Though it took a few times and the Holy Spirit prompting him to invite these “strangers” into his house (**vs. 17-23**)...Peter began to VALUE a group BECAUSE he realized that God VALUED this group of people....

- **The GOSPEL began to change his WORLDVIEW – specifically about people’s imago dei (image of God)...**

How does awareness look in YOUR home? Do the books you read, reflect awareness to ethnos beside your own? Books in particular represent hours you have spent in the minds of people you often respect and VALUE....this is why we read the study/scripture (by the way - all the co-authors are brown-skinned middle eastern men).

What about the last 6 people you texted? Who do you value to get counsel and encouragement? How

have African, Asian, and Middle Eastern believers of old and now influenced your sanctification – Christianity was and still is primarily an Eastern faith....but most of our scholarship & imagery would suggest otherwise – Be AWARE of this and examine your heart.

What about the podcasts you listen to? How aware of you of Jude 3 Project, I Got Something to Say, Abundant Life Christian Fellowship Podcast, Pass the Mic, Truth's Table....to name a few. How many African American Christian women authors have you sought out – a voice that has often been ignored in these discussions.

News outlets, social media, internet sources, conferences (MLK 50), and casual conversation have uniquely made us more aware of things we normally ignore...**but do your sources reflect a biblical worldview on ethnos?**

At this stage, you are considered to be extremely teachable and desire to know more.

- Final example - What about movies....anybody seen Black

Panther? Dope. Right – are you **AWARE** of why this movie drew so many AA's out in droves....and in other countries....before we go there – one of my co-workers son who is white, was born in 2009 and is now 8 – primarily knew Barack Obama as President ...and for Black History Month at his school – he chose to him (his parents have done a good job not bashing him – and its probable that they didn't' voted for him) ...but when she talked about why President Obama was significant, being he was the only BLACK president in the history of the US...he was sure his mom was wrong and she said “who else?” and he said “Abraham Lincoln mom.” “son, I'm pretty sure he was white!

- Bless his heart, but he is unaware...it doesn't make sense in his mind that President Obama was the first....just like Black Panther...not the first black superhero...but Spawn, Blade, Blankman, Hancock...not exactly big deal superheroes like Batman, Superman, Captain America, Spider Man, Flash....you get me....this was a first (not a side-kick) and it means a lot when VALUE,

DIGNITY, INTELLIGENCE, BEAUTY,
FAMILIAL VALUES, LOVE, AND PRIDE are
associated with Blackness...not
UNEDUCATED, , CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR,
LAZINESS, OPPRESSION, LACK, AND
HOPELESSNESS .

But as I mentioned earlier....IGNORANCE &
AWARENESS are primarily **cognitive stages** on
this spectrum...you can actually become competent
in the scripture/awareness and begin to care about
other ethnos....but as any good believer knows –
orthodoxy (BELIEF) is only as good as orthopraxy
(PRACTICE).

Thus...we see the 3rd tier in the spectrum:

INTENTIONALITY/INTERACTION: Time spent
together breaks down false assumptions. Mutual
respect & **active listening**. Initiative to build with
others not like yourself and to stand corrected.

While Peter was in Cornelius' household, he began
to understand the vision even better – once he
entered into the area and began to interact with

Cornelius family...and then he shared the gospel
(what we read earlier)– he began to see some
change.

What I love about the INTENTIONAL
INTERACTION in this account is that it began in a
HOUSE – not a church.

- Pastor Albert Tate, (AA Pastor of a multi-
ethnic church in California) said, *diversity
starts in our living rooms before they begin in
our churches.*

Healthy **interaction** with other ethnos/cultures
begins to break down many presuppositions and
unhealthy beliefs perpetuated through **ignorance**
and **unawareness**. Mutual respect, active listening
(LISTENING TO LISTEN, NOT TO BE HEARD), and
concern for others creates engaging environments
for all involved, regardless of race, gender, or class.
This is why attending sporting events, amusement
parks, concerts, and other celebratory events often
place us in multiethnic and multicultural
environments...BUT

While interaction is encouraging, and far better than ignorance, as well as a step up from **awareness**, it is NOT the goal of **discipleship**.

Discipleship happens in covenant communities...Peter was in a diverse city, but NEVER had other ethnos in his home OR vice versa – He admits this in (Acts 10:28)

This leads to our final tier on the spectrum:

GOSPEL COMMUNITY: Depth in relationships. Bearing one another burdens. Outdoing one another in love and service. Commitment to Unity.

After Peter & his crew travels to Joppa –**vs. 23-47** (INTENTIONALLY GOING WHERE JESUS TOLD HIM TO GO LIKE THE GREAT COMMISSION) preached the gospel, those that were Jewish that were with him had a stunning revelation – the Gentiles didn't need to the influence of their Jewish customs and have Jewish culture (circumcision) to be saved!

In fact in vs. 44 – it says, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message..”

- Peter didn't even get a chance to finish and look at the Holy Spirit – He gets all the credit! And it demonstrated another MAJOR POINT in community....
- They did not have to conform to our ways in order to be saved! Often we don't want **UNITY** in our churches, we want **UNIFORMITY**....leave your culture, your language, your livelihood at the door and be like us – then we can figure it out.....God shatters the notion of uniformity through the power of the Holy Spirit!

The beauty of Gospel Community is not SAMENESS, but ONENESS.

Oneness started with God the Father, God the Son, and the God the Spirit – 3 distinct Persons functioning as ONE....we can't let our distinctions not distract us from unity.

We saw these Gentiles get **baptized** which further affirmed their acceptance into the community of faith.

- As a result, true community begins as Peter is ASKED to stay in their home for several days.
- God is not trying to create cookie-cutter Christians, but Jesus has always prayed that we would be ONE, as he and the father are ONE – that's John 17.

Jesus prayed for this...now we often go to God in prayer to get answers, but do you realize you can **BE THE ANSWER** to Jesus' prayer when you demonstrate your oneness! (George Yancey)

- In communities that are centered around this type of response to the gospel, we don't just attend events together; we pray together, we weep together, we hurt together, we celebrate together, we run together, we play together, we share our faith together, we do life together - that is what we are trusting God to faithfully move

us forward...when my pain becomes your pain, when my hurt becomes your hurt, when my praise becomes your praise – THAT'S HOW I KNOW WE ARE FAMILY!!!!

MY ONLY WARNINGDON'T' FORGET

GALATIANS 2 - Peter goes through all this, yet he chooses to let his **FEAR OF MAN** (Jerusalem Council) cause him to distort the gospel....leading even Barnabas astray. We have to be brave and count the cost...

- Paul counted the cost and considered it worthy of the gospel to rebuke Peter (the rock) publicly because of this issue with the Gentiles - and Peter eventually cast his fears aside as well – the same struggle he feared in betraying Jesus before the crucifixion – the fear of man/suffering.

My prayer, by the power of God's Spirit - is that you will be **BRAVE**:

- **BRAVE** enough to admit your **Ignorance**
- **BRAVE** enough to engage areas in your life that lack **awareness**

- **BRAVE** enough to allow the Spirit of God to **intentionally** lead you to places that you might NOT normally go for the truth of the gospel.
- **BRAVE** enough not to fear man as you pursue **community** in our multi-ethnic world. We have the ONLY answer for unity between the nations – it’s only in Jesus!

Closing Thoughts

How many of you have siblings? How many of you grew up with all your siblings? How many of you might have siblings you never met? Ususally not comfortable to talk about it – because it means there is a sign of familial dysfunction.

- For most of us, we would be **shocked** if you found out we have siblings out there that we had no previous knowledge of...like me about 16 years ago -long story short I discovered I had a big brother (my Dad didn’t know what had become of him - but by God’s providence he found us and wanted to be a part of our lives)....me explain 3 things

in particular about this experience of meeting my big brother.

1. **There was FEAR and Excitement.** I was nervous and excited...it was the fear of the unknown, but the excitement of getting know my actual brother! But I was not nearly as nervous, as my brother over the years....see he knew he had a Dad out there that he never met..(had our last name) BUT he told me later - he did not want to “*mess up*” our family (too late - we already had that one covered)... other questions - how would this impact my Mom? How does this look to outsiders? How do we explain this? What if crushes our “*utopia*”?
 - a. **Many of you might have some fears about how this will change things for you and your family, but God hasn’t given us a spirit of fear....**
2. **My Dad was determined to reunite his family.** After my brother reached out to us...my dad was overjoyed his son was part of his life again- this was his son just like his other 2 - NOTHING was going to stop this

reunion after 40+ years. My Dad did everything in his power to make that union strong and fights to maintain it.

- a. **As determined as my earthly father was to see his family united...it pails in comparison to how our Heavenly Father allowed his only son to be crushed, humiliated, and abandoned so we could be family.**

3. It's messy, yes, but we are family and family dynamics are complex. For our family...it brought up the pain of the past, but all of a sudden, instead of looking at what was lost in the dysfunction, we saw what we I gained - another big brother, a sister in law, a nephew and niece...

- a. **God is not bringing together perfect people, he is perfecting us by bringing us together.**

I proclaim to you today...**YOU HAVE FAMILY THAT YOU HAVEN'T MET YET**...and what unites us far outweighs what separates us. And in the same way I connected, despite the dysfunction in

my family, we must understand the mandate of getting to know your multi-ethnic family of faith:

We have a lot more to gain than to lose as we come together. Imagine the witness to the world if we pursue this wholeheartedly! Will you be open to the work of his Spirit? Will you pursue gospel community and demonstrate to a dying world that unity across ethnic lines is not only possible through Jesus, but always been a part of his divine plan.

Let's pray.

[i] Paraphrased from Atlanta Pastor John O.

