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| Series: Proclaim | Reference: Acts 10:34-43 | Title: Clean or Unclean | Date: 05.08.2022 |
| Website Writeup: The Gospel is for all peoples & the Christian is called to Proclaim Christ to them. Who do you consciously, or unconsciously deem as unclean or unworthy of the Gospel? Who do you avoid sharing Jesus with? | | | |

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

The early church proclaimed reconciliation with God in Christ. Revealed in prophesy. Foreshadowed in Scripture. Confirmed by eyewitness. Proclaiming boldly the crucifixion & resurrection of Jesus brings salvation & transformation through repentance of sin & identification with Him. Salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ - our sins forgiven, we have reconciliation with God as a result of Jesus' atoning sacrifice (Ephesians 2:1-10). Everlasting salvation due to Christ, not based on any work of ours, before or after we encounter Jesus; once saved, always saved.

Believing salvation's based on my ability to earn favor with God before or after submission to Him is a works-based or a self-righteousness - salvation's no longer by grace through faith in Him, meaning Christ died for nothing. Rather, Christ's righteousness has been imputed to me, once & forever - I do nothing to earn it even after 'salvation' (book cover illustration).

The good news, the Gospel, available to all peoples in Christ despite background, past sins, culture, tribe, etc. And Jesus followers have been given this ministry of reconciliation to bring this revelation to all peoples, tongues, tribes & nations. *The Great Commission in Mt 28:18-20 where Jesus said... "All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Scripture speaks of nations not as political, but as ethnic boundaries. Jesus & Scripture always clear, the Gospel for all peoples, the whole human race. The Christian worldview...But we find that enculturation & tradition run deep; the gradual acquisition of the characteristics, beliefs & norms of a culture by a person. From birth until now we've experienced enculturation. Our worldview shaped by that process, the lens by which we perceive & process reality. We feel worldview tension now with many pushing hard for changes in views of sexuality, or the human family & who has authority to raise children - worldview questions.

A worldview answers the question, what's real? Which defines 'beliefs', answering the question, what's true? To 'values' answering, what's good or best? To 'behaviors' answering, what's done? To 'artifacts' (objects/concepts/laws) answering, what's made, obtained, or produced in society?

We can see the Worldview struggle in this popular lawn sign. Beliefs reflect worldview, so, "In this house we believe..." 'Black lives matter', of course. 'Women's rights are human rights', no brainer. 'No human is illegal', agreed (although actions can be illegal in breaking laws). 'Science is real', now *if* they mean...an explanation of an aspect of the natural world that's been repeatedly tested & corroborated in accordance with the scientific method, then sure, agreed, but it's not an answer to all things as often put forth. 'Love is Love', yes, but probably not in how it's meant here. 'Kindness is everything', over-exaggeration, but kindness always helps.

They may claim to have a Scientific Worldview since they say 'Science is real' & worldview addresses reality. But science can't be a worldview any more than an elephant can be a bicycle. Science is simply a method of exploration into the natural world & scientific theories are often overturned with new evidence. It's really a humanistic worldview since we notice everything's focused on human values & rights - human experience is reality minus the constraints of 'religion'.

Claiming they're scientific seems rational, born of the Hegelian Dialectic - thesis, antithesis & synthesis - the scientific process they trust & what we trust, we worship. But what they forget is the human element, sin of the deceptive heart. So, when science doesn't accommodate human desire, science is bent to accommodate. So, if a desire to fly is strong one might even bend science to say gravity's a social construct, but it doesn't make it so - jump off an overpass & find out. When science doesn't give you the political power you want, you bend the science so it does...you get my drift...

If we look at past American culture, we confess a wrong worldview where being white was viewed as the real human experience. Leading to believing others were less than human & accepted as truth in enough people to be dominant. Which lead to the value that what's good/best is to separate, subjugate & oppress non-whites. Which lead to behaviors played out in slavery, non-voting rights, sitting in the back of the bus, separate water fountains, etc. - what was done. Which lead to artifacts in the form of laws, signage & places of separation (double water fountains) - what society produced.

It's hard to admit the prevailing worldview in America was so evil - it warrants repentance. Recognize, we do nothing without thought. Thought manifests into action. When thoughts are wrong, behavior & what we produce become evil & destructive. *This is why 2 Corinthians 10:5 says, We demolish arguments & every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.* As Christians we intentionally allow Jesus, by His Scriptures & Holy Spirit, to shape our worldview, our reality! Jesus formulates our beliefs, values, behavior & what we produce - how it's supposed to work. Which is why Jesus, who ultimately brings peace in reconciliation with God & others, said He first brings division since He knew people wouldn't accept His message.

Tradition is like enculturation in that it's the transmission of customs & beliefs from generation to generation. For instance, whatever a persons faith-tradition is, certain things have been engrained in our psyche about faith. What's real, true, good or best,

done & produced. Some true to Scripture, some not. All denominations propagate certain things which aren't fully copacetic with the Scriptures. Some do better than others, and errant beliefs are largely due to culture, not official denominational positions, or are grey areas we can disagree on. Largely, they're issues which don't undermine the foundational Gospel message.

Some believe certain worship styles to be glorifying to God & others wrong. An issue easily argued since substance, the basic message of the Gospel within those churches, is unchanged despite different worship styles; preference, tomato/tomahto. What's more difficult are deeper beliefs under the surface in how we view God & others formed by surrounding culture. What should concern us isn't varied forms of worship, but the substance of it - some forms *may be* representative of errant substance, but most are just different expression of the same Gospel substance.

There are substance problems in certain churches/denominations. Protestants split from Catholicism on the foundational subject of justification by faith alone. **Here is the basic difference...(VIDEO)**. Protestants don't view baptism, justification, salvation, or our walk in Christ in a Catholic way. It's not what Scripture teaches, nor what Jesus taught. Can a person be saved in that system, possible, but it's more by chance than design. The errant substance of the message leads people away from Jesus, not to Him, giving a false sense of security in a system of works-based, or self-righteousness. A foundational difference of Gospel substance. Substance is important. Forms are also important, in that they can lead to Christ, but can be abandoned & reimagined when they cease to do this, or begin to take on a substance other than the true Gospel of Christ.

Join me in reading in Acts 10:34-43, p751 of your pew bibles. But let me preface by saying, just prior to our passage today we see the story of the Roman centurion, Cornelius, drawn to faith in Jesus. In vv1-3 it says...*At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ²He & all his family were devout & God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need & prayed to God regularly. ³One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. That vision instructed him to seek out Peter to hear what he had to say.*

Clearly a Gentile, a Roman Centurion, pursuing God, but unclear as to what the Gospel says. Jews regarded all Gentiles as dogs, less than human, especially a Roman Centurion! Peter even says later in v28...*"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."* He'd come to this conclusion since God simultaneously gave Peter a vision in order that he wouldn't avoid Cornelius, but would go & preach the Gospel to him since he needed to hear it.

Our passage begins in v34...*Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵but accepts from every nation the one who fears him & does what is right. ³⁶You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷You*

know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached - ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit & power, and how he went around doing good & healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews & in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰but God raised him from the dead on the third day & caused him to be seen. ⁴¹He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen - by us who ate & drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people & to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living & the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Traditionally racism's been defined as treating someone as inferior due to their skin color. Certainly not right, but the label's all wrong. Scripture teaches there's only the one human race made up of various ethnicities. You might call it 'ethnicism', but not all people of one skin color are of the same ethnicity & people tend to base their disdain on skin color, not ethnicity. My neighbors are Jamaican, they're black & don't like to be called African American, since they don't originate from Africa.

If someone can convince you there are separate races, being 'racist' is made easier. But a biblical worldview claims there's only one race, humanity, originating from one shared ancestor. God created all peoples in His image making it impossible to hate based on skin color. Everyone's an image bearer of God, our shared race! And God calls us to love all peoples, forcing us to deal with individuals on merit, not external unchangeable characteristics.

Our own Anika McMenamin grew up in South Africa where she was taught as a young girl that whites were superior. Conflicted, as a young girl she studied the Scriptures to clear up her confusion. Eventually she came away with a biblical worldview of love & respect for all peoples. Taking her thoughts captive to Christ, she renounced this familial racism viewing others through the lens of Christ ever since.

And in Acts we find, even with the Holy Spirit & all Jesus taught, the Disciples also still had lessons to learn. We may ask ourselves today, “Where's my worldview not reflecting Christ to the point that I view others as unclean or unworthy?” The Gospel changes us, knocking down cultural barriers, everyone's viewed as fellow image bearers of God in need of salvation.

The last two decades have seen a surprising trend among the Indian 'untouchable' caste, the Dalit, who don't belong to one of the four accepted castes of the varna system. They're converting en masse to Christianity. In India, the caste system separates people not allowing for movement between castes. Born into a caste, die in a caste, a system written into their constitution & worldview. But Indian Christians taking on a biblical worldview welcome the untouchable. Drawn by acceptance, escaping government & societal persecution thousands across India have been converting. In the Surkhet

district of Nepal, approximately 50k Dalit have converted from Hinduism to Christianity escaping discrimination they've known all their lives.¹ This is what Peter proclaims today, Jesus equally receives all who repent coming to Him by grace through faith.

Cornelius sent for Peter. Notice whether Peter proclaims Jesus to the Jewish High Priest, or to a gentile Roman Centurion, the substance of his message remains unchanged. That being, Jesus was a man of great power, crucified, died, rose from the dead & there's forgiveness in His name.

The application is - the gospel's a message for all peoples. It's not fluid in the sense that we can discard part of it in certain times & places. Can't tailor it to make it more palatable to certain listeners. Can't bend it to make more sense in our cultural moment. Rather, the same gospel's to be shared with all peoples.

Jesus said, *"I am the way & the truth & the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* There's only one way to everlasting life with God - Jesus - whether talking to a Hindu Dalit, Buddhist, Muslim, Roman Centurion, Atheist, or Jewish High Priest. God's revealed & communicated Himself to humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. He doesn't have multiple personality disorder. He is. And who He is, we find only in Jesus. Something His followers must become comfortable & confident with, since we're all called to the ministry of reconciliation. **The Christian worldview, the true reality of humanity, out of which we live with every thought taken captive to Christ.**

This doesn't mean the message is communicated the same way in every situation. Peter doesn't spend time appealing to Old Testament prophets with Cornelius, as in Acts 2 with a Jewish audience. There isn't just one way to share the gospel, but the gospel shared should be the same gospel substance, regardless with whom we share. There aren't many paths to God, there's only one & true love dictates that must be made clear.

Though the core message is the same, there's a new emphasis in the application of the gospel for Peter - God shows no partiality or favoritism (10:34). What's that mean? Well, Cornelius was a gentile & therefore wasn't included in God's covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob. Jewish ceremonial laws governed Jewish thought & practice on what was clean or unclean, from food to clothes, to the people with whom one could associate. These laws helped visually & physically reinforce God's holiness. To be in His presence meant doing everything possible to avoid contamination from sin. Jews extrapolated this to consider Gentiles no different in their unclean state than a pig.²

¹ Christopher Sharma, "Nepalese Dalits Abandon Hindu Faith En Masse. They Believe in Jesus Who Will Save Them," *AsiaNews.it*, July 7, 2017 <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Nepalese-Dalits-abandon-Hindu-faith-en-masse.-They-believe-in-Jesus-who-will-save-them-41225.html>

² This is discussed at length in Tim Keller, *Evangelism: Studies in the Book of Acts* [New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2005], 87-91

But, Israel was always called to be a light to the nations. There's always been an inroad into the Jewish faith even before Christ including a baptismal right of passage as symbolism of coming to faith in the God of Israel. The Court of the Gentiles in the front of God's Holy Temple was a reminder they were to be a witness to other nations & Gentiles could also walk with God through repentance & faith. In their holy calling to be separate, they'd taken that as license to hate & look down on others. Never God's intention.

Peter realizes in his divine encounter with Cornelius, all peoples are worthy as God's creation to hear the Gospel! Contamination comes only in the compromise of Truth, not in sharing Him with others. As Christians, we're called to the ministry of reconciliation to all peoples. What God has made clean, let no one declare to be unclean (Acts 10:15)!

The cross is the great leveler. Despite background, sin, successes, failures, or ethnicity, when you come to the cross of Christ, you're made new. Peter proclaimed the gospel that day & realized the truth of an impartial God. Paul would later celebrate the same when he declared, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male & female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28).

It's vital for us to keep clear the Christian worldview, to guard understanding of the true Gospel & live out of it. It makes a difference in how we view & treat others. Substance the same, ways of communicating it vary. Which people do we, consciously or unconsciously, treat as unclean or unworthy? Whom do we avoid & how does that align with the proclamation of Peter on that day to a Gentile Centurion?