

“Deconstructing Racial Categories” **“We the People” #4**

INTRODUCTION

Micah 6:8 NIV - 8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

As we study our key passage from Micah 6:8 this week we want to focus on how applying it in our lives affects the way we treat others, the way we do justice. In our current culture it is easy to view others as different from ourselves for a number of reasons. And once we categorize people as “those who are like us” and “those who are different” we may find ourselves treating “them” differently. But that is not how God views us. Paul faced similar issues in his day. When preaching to the Gentiles he reminded them that all of us were once alienated from God, but by grace we are no longer “aliens”, we all belong to God’s family.

Ice Breaker (Optional—8 min)

What is the nationality of your family of origin?

STUDY QUESTIONS (45 MIN)

1. The Categories

Ephesians 2:11-12 NLT - 11 Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. 12 In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope.

Paul was raised in the strictest of Jewish traditions. He was a Pharisee; one who followed and taught the Jewish laws. But God

John 17:21-23 NLT - 21 I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one--as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. 22 "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. 23 I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.

What should the unity amongst believers reflect to the world?

The church should be the place where barriers are broken, and unity is forged. This doesn’t mean denying that injustice exists, but rather identifying where it does exist and changing behavior to help in the healing process.

Ask God to open your eyes to those who have been treated unjustly and allow Him to show you how you can reach out and invite them into a deeper relationship with you, perhaps over lunch or coffee.

WRAP-UP

We know from Micah 6:8 that God calls us to act justly towards others. But we have placed people in categories that allow us to view “them” as different from “us”. We are all equal in God’s eyes, and Christ died on the cross to make a way for all of us to come to God and break down our hostility towards one another, unifying us through Him. As God’s people we can lead the way to healing the injustice of racism.

Memory Verse

Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.
- Ephesians 2:16 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members’ needs: _____

Challenge- This week read, watch or listen to works produced by men and women of color.

called him to preach to a very different group, the Gentiles; those who were not Jews.

How did Paul say that the Jews viewed the Gentiles? Upon what did the Jews base their superiority to the Gentiles? In what way do you find this similar to racial prejudice we observe today?

Ephesians 2:13-16 NLT - 13 But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ. 14 For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. 15 He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. 16 Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

Paul refers to a wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles. But God broke down the wall of hostility that separated those groups.

What did Paul say now unites the Jews and Gentiles?

Walls of hostility still remain among us today. We see this when people are categorized by race. By lumping everyone into a category and labeling them, we stop seeing each person as God's child, our brothers and sisters. We see them as "others" or "dangerous", when in fact God sees us all the same.

What kinds of generalizations have you heard applied to people by their race? What are some of the images, or narratives, you've been exposed to that would cause you to fear someone based on their ethnicity?

2. Christ, the Pinnacle of Unity

Ephesians 2:17-18 NLT - 17 He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. 18 Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

Paul told the Ephesians that all can come to the Father through the Spirit because of Christ. The unity offered through Jesus death was not limited to the division of Jew and Gentile.

Galatians 3:26-29 NLT - 26 For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. 28 There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

What are some other categories that Paul tells us no longer exist because of our faith in Christ? Can you still give examples of injustice based on gender (male/female) or economic status(slave/free)?

The invitation now is that we honor the price Jesus paid on that cross by breaking down our walls and letting each other in.

Luke 10:27-29 NLT - 27 The man answered, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 28 "Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!" 29 The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Like the man in Luke 10, we may already know that God wants us to love Him and love our neighbors. But just like that man, we might want to justify ourselves by asking "who qualifies as my neighbor?" Jesus response was the parable of the good Samaritan. Samaritans were categorized as evil heretics by the Jews, yet Jesus showed that assumption to be false in this parable.

Who are the people in your life that are most different from you? Is there any group you may have, consciously or unconsciously, excluded as your neighbor?

3. A Way Forward

There is hope that the people of God can lead in the conversation of racial justice. Jesus prayed to His Father for unity among His followers.