

Dealing with Cultural Differences

The church in Jerusalem was composed of Jews who converted to Christ in the Book of Acts. They had a common lineage, language, and culture. However, the Gospel was never intended for just one group of people but for the whole world. Gentiles dressed differently, had different norms, different languages, and were less than Jewish. Much of Paul's writings dealt with cultural differences and how he related to those different groups.

Today we have the same issues in the Lord's church. Our task is to evangelize the lost no matter where they come from. Cultural differences can be hinderances but they can also open new doors of opportunity. In John 4 we read of the Samaritan woman by the well. Jews stayed away from those half breed apostate Jews. But they were receptive to Jesus. In Acts 8 Philip went to Samaria and preached Jesus to them, verse 5, A great many believed and were baptized, verse 12. Few groups were as receptive as the Samaritans.

Sometimes differences make us uncomfortable. Peter preached to Cornelius and his household in Acts 10. In Acts 11, He went back to Jerusalem and one thing the brethren could not believe was Peter going and eating with them, Acts 11.2-3. While we might judge them harshly, we might be uncomfortable preaching in the back woods of Africa as the church meet is tent. There are no pews as everyone sits on the ground. There is no electricity, projectors or writing boards. But they have a thirst for the truth and travel by foot for hours from their villages. They sit for hours on end and ask questions wanting deeper understanding.

At the same time, we have to understand some cultural differences can be a hindrance because they clash with God's word. The practices of the Gentiles listed in Romans 1 were culturally acceptable but morally condemned. Social norms do not make the sinful ok. Christians are called to be different from the world. "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God." (1 Peter 2:15-16) – Dennis Tucker