

Unmasking idols: Five things the early church was known for. Multi racial.

Passage. Read Galatians 3:26-29 and Acts 13:1-3

The early church was marked by radical inclusivity, demonstrated in both its message and practice. In Acts 13, the leaders of the church at Antioch came from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of God's kingdom. Simeon (called Niger), Lucius of Cyrene, Barnabas, and Saul—were gathered. As they prayed and fasted, the Holy Spirit called them to send Barnabas and Saul to share the Gospel beyond Jewish boundaries.

It is significant that the Holy Spirit would use such a diverse group to be the first group to discern and commission Barnabas and Saul (Paul) to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.

In Galatians 3:26-29, Paul elaborates on this truth, that he lived, calling all people, regardless of ethnicity, social status, or gender, to faith in Jesus. Faith in Christ brings us into one family, heirs of the promises given to Abraham, who himself was a gentile as Yahweh called him to the Father of not just the Jews but many nations (Genesis 17:5).

These passages remind us that the Gospel is for all people, breaking down the barriers that historically divided humanity. However, living out this truth today means confronting long-standing attitudes and beliefs that can hinder the unity the Gospel proclaims.

Unity in Christ.

Galatians teaches that in Christ, distinctions that once divided people—race, social status, gender—are no longer primary. Paul states that "there is neither Jew nor Gentile."

What does this mean for how we view racial and ethnic identity in Christ? Are there beliefs or assumptions we hold about race that might hinder us from fully living out the unity of the body of Christ?

Discussion Questions.

Are their beliefs about race and identity we need to challenge?

How has the church historically participated in either breaking down or reinforcing racial barriers?

How Can the Church Today Reflect the Radical Inclusivity of Acts 13?

The leadership in Antioch was multi-ethnic, and the church was called to send the Gospel to the Gentiles. We live in a very Anglo region. Do you think seeking diversity in a local church is important? Why or why not?

Do you think there are any Social or Cultural Barriers Within Our Churches that undermine us carrying the gospel as well as we could?

In challenging them, is there a risk that we could violate the unity we are seeking? How would we do this in a way that seeks to preserve unity of the body?

How can we foster deeper relationships across racial, cultural, and social lines within and outside the church?

Application:

We must continually examine our beliefs and practices to live out the Gospel truth of unity in Christ. The early church challenged the norms of its day, breaking down divisions between Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, male and female. Today, we have the same call to challenge racial, cultural, and social barriers that continue to divide people.

Which of the following areas would the Holy Spirit call you to live out?

- advocating for justice
- practicing hospitality
- cultivating relationships that reflect the inclusivity of the Gospel. As we reflect on these questions, let us ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any areas of our hearts that need transformation so that we may fully embody the love and unity that Christ has made possible for all people.