

Culture Shift Small Group Guide

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. If you had to move to a nation you have never lived in before, which one would you choose?
2. Do you like sleeping in more than 2 hours past the time you usually wake up when the opportunity affords itself?

Read the following passage: Acts 15:1-21.

Acts 15 was a pivotal moment in the history of the church. A group of believers belonging to the party of the Pharisees felt that Gentile believers should be circumcised and required to keep the Law of Moses. This was not a minor point of contention. This issue went to the very heart of the Gospel. For the Jewish people this issue affected almost everything because the Law of Moses seemed to speak to just about everything. The Law of Moses addressed work, worship, diseases, sex, childbirth, money, borrowing animals from your neighbor, the proper treatment of your parents, and a host of other subjects.

It was impossible to separate Jewish identity from the Law of Moses. The question of the relationship between the Law of Moses and the Gospel was intimately tied up with questions about ethnicity and culture. Is the Gospel essentially a mono-ethnic, mono-cultural message for an essentially mono-ethnic, mono-cultural community, or is there something bigger going on? The decision the apostles and elders reached was perhaps the most significant moment for the future of the multiethnic church. Their action was the seed of a major culture shift in the early church, and it is a powerful example of how we can foster similar culture shifts in our context.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What did the apostles and elders decide about the relationship between the law of Moses and salvation? What were some of the ethnic and cultural implications of the theological conviction at which they arrived? (Consider also Romans 3:21-24 and Ephesians 2:14-16.)
2. What are some of the influences (people, experiences, cultural context, etc.) that have made a significant impact on your convictions? (There are almost always some influences that we are not fully aware of.) What do you think were some of the primary influences that led the apostles and elders to their decision? Do you think there were any influences they might have had to resist? Explain.
3. To what extent do you think your views on race and justice have been influenced by the supremacy of Christ (Colossians 1:15-20; Acts 15:11), the Scriptures (Acts 15:15), Spirit-led interpretations of your personal experiences (Acts 15:7-10), and the wise input of brothers and sisters (Acts 15:6-7)? Explain.

4. Read Acts 15:19-20. The apostles and elders were convinced that the Gentiles should not be required to keep the law of Moses. They believed unnecessary burdens should not be placed on anyone who wanted to follow Jesus. But they also knew that unity requires that we take into consideration the concerns of our brothers and sisters. And so they instructed the Gentile converts to refrain from several practices that would have caused friction with Jewish believers and their local Jewish communities. What are some considerations we may need to keep in mind or sacrifices we may need to make for the sake of unity (particularly across racial and ethnic categories) in our local church context? What should we do when we feel like our needs or interests are being neglected in the community?
5. Read Matthew 5:21-26. What does Jesus' teaching indicate about the urgency of reconciliation? How is reconciliation intimately connected with the Gospel?
6. Although Martin Luther King, Jr. faced a great deal of resistance, why do you think the civil rights movement of the 1960s ultimately made a significant impact on American culture?
7. What are some ways a Gospel-centered revival might practically impact culture in the United States in the present?

Pray