

ESSENTIAL GENES : 3 : THE INCLUSION GENE

There are some places exclusively held for 'Gold Star' people – and others are kept out. E.g. First Class, Business Class – and then there's Economy.

What are some reasons for exclusion?

Cultural differences such as colour of skin, language, even food?

Or social differences such as income, tidiness, where you live? Or maybe the way you bring up your children?

There are insiders and outsiders all around us.

We inherit these traits – from parents, schools, churches – they set up walls to keep those like us in, and others out.

How can we reach out to those outside? Prejudice hinders God's mission

Acts 10-11 is one story about how Christians had to face these prejudices.

Cornelius was a Roman army officer in the Italian regiment. How is he described in 10.2? He had a vision – 10.3-6. What was he to do?

Simon Peter was a disciple, a Jew – an insider . Cornelius was a Gentile, an outsider . He loved God, but to become a Jew, he had to obey Jewish laws, be circumcised, and basically leave behind his Gentile ways.

Peter had always been a Jew – it was second nature to him to obey the law and keep Jewish customs and practices.

A prayer that pious male Jews prayed (especially Pharisees) : Thank you God that I was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.

Peter in his turn, had a vision. What did he see? 10.9-16.

He is told to kill and eat – he was hungry – but why couldn't he obey? Three times he was told, 'What God has made clean, you must not call unclean' or common, or profane (depending on your translation).

Is there anything that others eat that you would consider 'unclean' or yuk? Jewish laws, see e.g. Leviticus 11, were very detailed as to what could and could not be eaten by God's people. We might ask why, and some say for health reasons, others say they are associated with pagan practices, but some seem pretty harmless. Nevertheless, that was the law which Peter had kept faithfully during his life,

This law also led to pride in Jews – 'We are better than others who eat these animals. We can't associate with them.'

One of the problems that the Israelites faced was the temptation to marry women from other cultures, and join in the worship of other peoples' gods. See e.g. Ezra 10.10-11. But now God was saying, these animals are no longer unclean, and you can associate, even eat, with Gentiles.
Jewish writing: Jubilees 22.16: Keep yourselves separate from the nations, do not eat with them, do not imitate their rituals or associate with them.

What had changed, that Peter is told to eat what was considered unclean, and associate with Gentiles?

10.17-23 shows that at once Peter was beginning to learn this important lesson, He invites the men in and gives them lodging for the night. Then the next day, he set off with them for Caesarea.

Read Acts 10.24-29

He goes to Cornelius' home and teaches that God shows no favouritism. Forgiveness through Jesus Christ is available for everyone, Jew, Gentile, rich, poor..... Then, 10.44-48 – what happens that astounds the circumcised believers who had come with Peter?

This was confirmation, that God does welcome everyone who comes to him through his Son. The Jewish believers couldn't deny it. The gospel changes our attitudes to each other.

Notice the cross – vertical – showing how God relates to us, and horizontal showing how we should relate to each other.

Ephesians 2.14-21

The gospel breaks down walls and uses the bricks to connect us with each other. All of us are made in God's image, and when we belong to him, we are one people.

The blend is hard, but healthy.

How prejudiced are we? How can we change? Do we want to change?

Reflect on your relationships – who is close? Are they similar to you, or different?

When you spot differences,
Suspend judgment
Enter into dialogue
Hear their story
Celebrate the differences

What unites us is greater than what divides us.

To what extent do I associate only with people who are similar to me and to what extent do I include others who are different from me?