

POWER OF ONE LESSON 1: ONE HEART

Matthew 22:34-40

LIST OUT SOME WAYS THAT YOU CAN THINK OF THAT OUR WORLD IS DIVIDED:

What did you come up with? Here are a few things to think about: race, countries, schools, class, denominations, etc. Compile your lists together on a large sheet of paper. Go through your lists and mark each one of these that come from God. How many did you come up with? Was there any at all?

As I have studied and thought about this I came up with very minimal divisions that I could really justify "crediting" to God. But somehow we have become a very divided world. The more our world is divided things seem to get worse. **THE MORE OUR WORLD IS DIVIDED THE FARTHER WE GET FROM GOD.**

Does this make sense? If these divisions do not come from God but we practice them isn't that sin and doesn't sin separate us from God? The farther we are away from God the less effective we are. So let's do away with the divisions and move forward. If only it was that easy.

It is a little harder than it sounds isn't it? There are so many that I do not think about because they have just become natural. So we better act quickly. There is a lot of division to undo so we are going to focus on only a couple of parts of this for right now. Throughout this study I want you to imagine the power of Christians all over the world working together with one heart, one purpose, one passion, and as one church.

Let that sit with you for a while. Maybe shrink it down for now. Imagine your church working together. Imagine you working together with Christian students from other churches in your community. It is a powerful idea that I hope to see fleshed out in my lifetime. So let's dig in.

Have you ever thought that life was complicated? The divisions we have talked about alone can be confusing enough. It could make you ask questions like what is important? Who am I supposed to like or love? What people is it okay for me to hang out with and agree with?

In the day of Jesus things were pretty complicated and divided. There was a system of law that God had put in place with the intent of protecting His people to free and simplify their lives. Over the years religious leaders distorted God's intent and began to complicate the system by, twisting and adding rules among a wide variety of other problems. So when Jesus comes on the scene, the way of life and belief system that His Father had set up was in shambles. When Jesus was trying to restore things to their rightful place, many of the religious leaders were not happy. They wanted to stop Him, discredit Him, distract Him, and splinter the following that He had established. Let's take a look at the encounter that takes place.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:34-40

Did you notice how the Sadducees had already approached Jesus? The Sadducees and Pharisees were two separate factions of the Jewish faith. Just a quick reminder of the division that was in place. This is one of my favorite encounters in the scripture. In one single moment Jesus sums it all up and stuns His detractors. Everything we are about in this life boils down to loving God and loving people.

There is so much going on here but I want us to focus on this one idea.

1. ALL OF US SHOULD HAVE A HEART THAT IS CONSUMED WITH A LOVE FOR GOD AND A LOVE FOR PEOPLE.

When you boil things down to this concept the divisions go away. When you simplify things this way the divisions, distractions and debates begin to melt away. It is a beautiful thing.

As a church, meaning both your local church and Christianity as a whole, we are going to have many things to overcome such as culture, upbringing, class, and etc. That process is so much easier if you begin with loving God and loving people. So how do we go about this?

a. WE FOCUS ON LOVING GOD FIRST.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2

It does not come naturally for us to love other people and to unite together. (See the list of divisions again if necessary). We have to start with drawing close to God, allowing Him to change us so we are able to think like Him. Truly loving people, as we will see later, is so much deeper than just getting along with or tolerating others. It takes more than just temporary short term encounters. We are going to have to draw close to God and allow Him to change us. We do this through the following actions.

i. PRAYER

I list this first because I think we underestimate the power of prayer. Also, we often put such an important emphasis on scripture that we forget that God still wants to meet with us and speak to us each and every day. God still wants to move in our world today. He wants to change us and those around us in a way we couldn't ever imagine. So if we are going to be a part of this change we must talk to God.

ii. SCRIPTURE

We need to read God's word so we can learn about Him. We will learn about how He works in the world. We will also learn what He expects from us and what we are supposed to be doing. We are challenged to try and live differently. I believe this comes through in the Gospels. In the words of Christ we are challenged, shaped, and united with one purpose so it becomes a lot easier to see what is important. Jesus cuts through our messy discussions and misconceptions, and paints a clear picture of what it means to follow Him.

CHALLENGE: Read only the Gospels for a month. Take in as much as you can at a time and see how it affects your outlook on things.

I believe the Gospels will push us closer to being one with each other. If nothing else, when we live out what is in the scriptures, we will not have time for disagreements and division with each other.

iii. DOING WHAT GOD SAYS

Jesus, who was God with skin on said, "If you love me you will obey my commandments." So if we are going to love God we have to do what He says. Not just the things we like or what seems to be easy, but everything He calls us to do. As you do the things God calls you to, you will want to do more. You will want to draw closer to Him. Once you go from just believing to living, your heart truly begins to change. You will begin to let go of the divisions that you are holding on to so tightly.

b. WE LOVE PEOPLE.

These two ideas, loving God and loving people, are going to constantly be connected and come back throughout this study. You can't do one without doing the other. Much of this study will deal with loving people. So I am just going to hit on a couple of important concepts and we'll break down a lot of these even more as we go.

i. WE SHOULD LOVE PEOPLE WHO DO NOT LOVE US.

And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. Luke 6:33

I know a lot of people who say they love others and they do. They love their families. They love people who think and look like them. That is all well and good but so what. I know a lot of lost people who do the same thing. We have to go above and beyond to love everyone. Jesus even takes things a step further than many of us are willing to go. He calls us to love our enemies. This changes your thoughts on loving your neighbor doesn't it?

Think of some people who you would consider your enemies, both locally and globally. Let it wash over you that God wants you to love them too.

ii. WE LOVE PEOPLE BY MEETING THEIR NEEDS.

When we are honest we have to admit that we have many needs. We have physical needs for food, water, and staying healthy everyday. We have financial needs. We have emotional needs. We need encouragement to be pushed to press on. We need others to lift us up and to spur us on. We also have spiritual needs. Each of us has a hole in our life that can only be filled by God. No matter how much others love us, and that is important, the hole is still there until God fills it. If we are going to persevere in this life that God has given us for the long haul, we are going to have to meet each other's needs.

We will continue to dig through these ideas throughout this study. These ideas are at the core of becoming one. I want to close by challenging you with something. In the spirit of us having one heart, I encourage you to ask God to give you a heart like His. To allow you to see others the way that He sees them. I believe He will honor that request. If you strive to live this way it will drastically change your outlook on life and your ability to love God and His people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS LESSON 1

1. Do you believe that division is a sin?
2. What divisions do you see in your church/home/school/community?
3. How can you be a part of healing those divisions?
4. How does the idea of loving God and people simplify your life?
5. How does your life need to change so you can truly love God and people?
6. What are some specific ways that you can love God and people?
7. How might things look differently if you loved God and People?
 1. At your church
 2. Your home
 3. Your school
8. What do you think might change in the world if everyone began loving God and loving people?