

## **CoreGroup Guide | Christian In Name Only - Part 4**

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### **Welcome**

Welcome to the fourth and final week of our series “Christian in Name Only.” For the last few weeks we have wrestled with the reality that people in positions of power are increasingly using the Christian faith to justify behavior that is contrary to the life, ministry, and teaching of Jesus. We finish the series this week by examining the ways in which Christianity is being used to enforce a social order where certain groups are placed higher than others. This distortion is consistent, widespread, and harmful, weaving itself into the fabric of our society at an alarming rate. But Jesus practiced radical equality, and calls us to do the same.

### **Opening Prayer Activity**

Today we are invited to start our time together with some deep breathing and mindful grounding. This week brings another hard topic, but one that is critically important for us to discuss as a faith community. Let’s take a moment to center ourselves and invite God into this shared space.

To begin, find a comfortable position and set aside any potential distractions. You can close your eyes if you would like. As you sit in silence, imagine taking in a deep breath and moving the air towards each part of your body, starting with your head, neck, and shoulders, then through your spine and chest, arms and legs, and to the tips of your fingers and toes.

As you breathe in, pull in calmness, courage, and hope to every part of your body. Fill yourself with the wisdom and peace of the Holy Spirit.

As you breathe out, push out all of the noise, the chaos, the worry, and the strife. Blow it out as far as it will go. Empty yourself of the angst.

Breathe in calmness, courage, and hope.

Breathe out chaos, worry, and strife.

Breathe in wisdom and peace.

Breathe out angst.

Amen.

### **Ice Breaker**

Which do you prefer, even numbers or odd? What does this say about your personality?

### **The Head**

A few decades after the resurrection of Jesus, the apostle Paul wrote one of his first letters to the Galatian church, located in modern day Turkey. Some of the believers there had become confused about the true meaning of the gospel. In this letter, we learn that God’s blessing, through Jesus, was now available to all people, regardless of ethnicity, social status, or gender.

## Galatians 3:26-29

*<sup>26</sup> You are all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> Now if you belong to Christ, then indeed you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise.*

- What does it mean to clothe yourself with Christ? What are the “articles of clothing” (so to speak) that you put on when you claim the name of Christian?
- 2,000 years ago the divisions of the day were Jew vs Greek, slave vs free, and male vs female. What are the most prominent divisions in our world today?
- Why does Paul bring up Abraham's descendants at the end of this passage? [See the Book of Genesis for more info, specifically Genesis 15:5-6.]
- Why would this promise to Abraham have mattered so much to the original recipients of this letter? Why should it matter to us today?

## The Heart

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John describes a vision of heaven that reflects his deep belief in what it means to be a follower of Christ:

*<sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and there was a great crowd that no one could number. They were from every nation, tribe, people, and language. They were standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They wore white robes and held palm branches in their hands. [Revelation 7:9]*

Ultimately Jesus represents a vision for humanity that is *not* marked by division and hierarchy, but rather by equality, diversity, and abundance. The kingdom of God has room for all!

- What images come to mind when you envision humanity as God intended us to be?
- What do you think is the underlying motivation for people to create unequal social orders? Is it fear, scarcity, power, ignorance, sin? Something else? Why do people grab on to these divisive and distorted rhetorics in the first place?
- Where might you be unintentionally perpetuating the hierarchies of our society?
- How can you grow your compassion for all of God's people?

## The Hands

This trend of using Christianity to support a harmful social order is widespread and quickly becoming a normalized part of our society, but the good news is that we are part of that society as well! We have the power to recognize this distortion, name it, and do something about it.

- Where is one place you could push back a little this week? How can you do so in a way that honors what it means to be a follower of Christ, in more than just name?
- We often use the word “radical” to describe the actions of Jesus – Radical equality, radical hospitality, radical inclusivity. What does the word radical mean to you?
- What is one way you can live out your faith in a radical way this week?
- How can the group be praying for you to take this step?

## Going Deeper

The recommended memory verse for the *Christian in Name Only* series was 1 Peter 2:9 from the Common English Bible (CEB):

*"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of the darkness into his amazing light."*

Whether you memorized it or not, read through this verse three times together as a group. For those who have the verse committed to memory, try closing your eyes as you recite the scripture together. How does God speak to you through these words?

## Closing Prayer

Good and gracious God, thank you for choosing us, for knowing us, and for calling us out of the darkness into your amazing light. As we go forward into the world today, help us to carry that light with us wherever we go. Help us to bear witness to the life and ministry of your son, Jesus Christ, so that we may be Christians in name, in word, in action, and in love. Amen.