

Giving Christianity Back to Agape Love: A New Paradigm for Being Church Together

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Chapter Discussion Questions

Chapter 4: Oneness

1. Jesus prays “that they may all be one.” (John 17: 21) Page 19 and 20: “Connection is the opposite of separation and is at the heart of Oneness... Oneness also means interdependence... Paul, the first century Christian apostle, said that we are “one body.” Affirming the body’s connection and interdependence, Paul stated, “If one member (of the body) suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” (1 Corinthians 12: 26)

What does being “one” mean for you and your church- one with God, with others, and with the natural world?

2. Page 22: “Counter to Oneness is the old theological paradigm of separation.”

How do you see the separation paradigm still alive- in the world, in the church, in ourselves? Have you felt “tragedy fatigue” (p. 24), despair or overwhelm as you look out at our world?

3. Page 20: “In the Christian tradition, this kingdom of God is spoken of paradoxically as ‘already’ and ‘not yet.’ ‘Already’ means that the kingdom is *here now*, among us (“the kingdom of God has come near”- Mark 1: 15). ‘Not yet’ means that the kingdom is not yet fully realized... Oneness is synonymous with what Jesus called the kingdom of God.”

In what ways are we “already” one?

It can be overwhelming seeing how we have not lived out oneness. What ways do you feel called to bring about Oneness and the kingdom of God in your life and the world?

Are any of your callings to serve expressed through the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations (Page 24)?

4. Page 25: “The world may not change overnight. Our job, paradoxically, is not first to change the world. Our job is to change ourselves first by being instruments of God’s love and Oneness in our lives and relationships. Our job is to practice giving without attachment to the fruits of our actions. Our job is to not get so caught up in the magnitude of our tasks that we give up or burn out.”

Why might it be important to give “without attachment to the fruits of our actions”? How do you practice non-attachment in your service?

Close in blessing from page 25: ‘Jesus reminds us: “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:11) In the spirit of Jesus, let us embody the joy, peace and love we wish to see as we work towards making God’s Kingdom of Oneness real in the world.’

Chapter 5: Original Blessing, Original Sin

1. Page 28: “For centuries, Christianity has perpetuated the belief that humans are born in sin.”

If you grew up in church, were you taught this doctrine of “original sin”? If so, how did it affect you?

2. Page 29 says that Christians have lost sight of our “original blessing... Jesus points to this original blessing in his teachings and parables. Jesus does not say that we are born in sin, but rather that we are “the light of the world” and “the salt of the earth.” At the same time, Jesus is aware of the destructiveness of sin. He admits that we hide our light under a bushel, preventing it from being seen. When we forget our original blessing, Jesus says that we become as salt that has lost its flavor. (Matthew 5: 13-16)

What is the significance of our “original blessing”? What difference would it make in how we view ourselves and our actions?

3. Page 30-31: “In a way, Augustine was not entirely wrong about sin. The truth is that we have everything inside us in the realm of consciousness- good, bad, love, fear, altruism, lust, etc. Therefore we do well never to judge others...If everything is inside of us, then each of us has the potential for the highest good and the most horrific evils. The question is: which part of ourselves do we feed? If we feed the lower nature, it will grow stronger. If we do not feed our higher nature, day by day it will grow weaker, just as a muscle that atrophies over time.”

As you look at your daily/weekly routines, which part of yourself do you feed? What are some practical ways that you can feed your higher nature more so that, like a muscle, it might grow stronger?

4. Page 31: “Paramhansa Yogananda said, ‘thoughts are universally and not individually rooted.’¹ Our task in feeding our higher nature is attunement. We attune ourselves with a consciousness that already exists (i.e., love, peace, joy)... If we are to tap into the original blessing that is our nature- pure love, unconditioned peace- we must be diligent in our spiritual habits, surround ourselves with uplifting spiritual community, and offer ourselves to grace, the real catalyst for change.”

As you attune into your original blessing, what are your regular spiritual habits?

How have you surrounded yourself with uplifting spiritual community?

In what ways do you offer yourself to grace, “the real catalyst for change”?

¹ Yogananda, Paramhansa, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, (Crystal Clarity Publishers, <https://www.ananda.org/autobiography>), Chapter 15.

Chapter 6: The Bible and Belief

1. Page 36: What do you make of passages in the New Testament that go against modern ethical standards? How do you interpret and react to these two passages from the book of Ephesians:

“Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.”

(Ephesians 5: 22-24)

And:

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.” (Ephesians 6: 5-6)

2. Page 37: “What if the Bible is both *inspired by God* and *people’s experiences of God*? In that way, the Word of God in scripture is both human *and* divine, just like Jesus. The Bible is divinely inspired, but not without the filters of human experience.”

Page 38: “God speaks to people where they are. God’s words in one time and place aren’t necessarily God’s words in another setting. God’s words to one people will not be God’s words to another, different group of people.”

What do you think of this “evolutionary” view of scripture?

What are your thoughts on the Ephesians New Testament passages about women and slavery through an alternative, “evolutionary” lens on Page 41-42?

3. What do you think of the interpretation in this Chapter of “turning the other cheek” as a “way of responding creatively to violence **without** violence”? (Page 39)
4. Page 42: “Even when we claim to hear the voice of God- the inner voice of love- we do so through our own human filter. Even in the Bible, our most sacred Christian text, human and divine are intertwined in an intricate web of beauty, inspiration, and complication. In an evolutionary reading of the Bible, head **and** heart are both essential to biblical interpretation.”

How does this insight inform how you interpret scriptural texts?

Which do you use more as you read scripture- head, or heart? Which do you see as more important?

Closing Reading and Prayer from Page 44: “Jesus invites us to ask the same questions that he asked: does scripture align with the God of unconditional, agape love? Do these stories and texts encourage all people to live from a place of expansive, inclusive love?

“Jesus modeled a radical re-interpretation of all scripture through the filter of love. This was Jesus’ foundation.” Let it be ours.