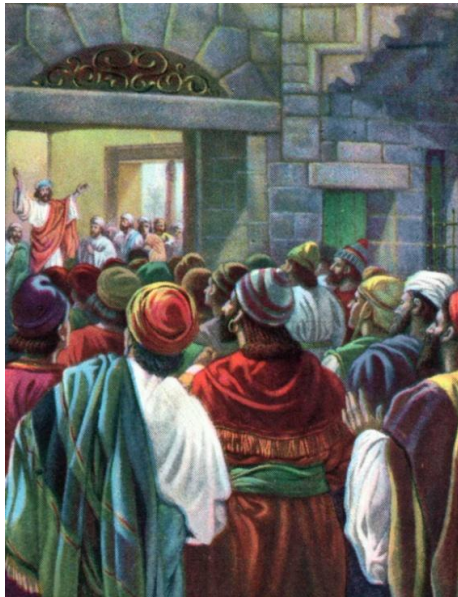


SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 3



A PROBLEM WITHIN THE CHURCH

Scripture Text: Acts 15:1-31

In Amos, *heathen* is the word used, in Acts, *Gentiles*. The words are often used interchangeably. Since Israel was God's chosen people and Gentiles were any people not Israelites, the name Gentiles came to mean people who are not God's people, or heathen.

We have studied the problem presented at the home of Cornelius. We also learned how the Holy Spirit helped Peter and the Apostles find the solution. Today we study of another problem presented to the leaders of the church at Jerusalem. Returning from their missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch. Then visitors coming from Judaea brought up a problem. Under the power of the Holy Spirit working through the hearts of these faithful men, God made plain to His servants His mind in the matter. The answer is that Christ was meant for the whole world, and God had just one way to accomplish this—a heart work.

MEMORY VERSE: *But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.*
—Acts 15:11

DAILY READINGS:

- Mon.—Ephesians 4:1-16 The unity of the Spirit.
- Tue—1 Corinthians 6:9-20 Glorify God in your body.
- Wed.—Ephesians 5:6-20 The works of light and darkness.
- Thu.—John 10:31-42 Believe God.
- Fri.—Luke 2:25-35 Simeon sees Light of the Gentiles.

Devotional Reading: John 8:31-47 True children of Abraham.

A Spirit of Opposition

Acts 15:1-5 The visiting brethren **taught . . . Except ye be circumcised . . . ye cannot be saved.** Discerning the tension, the church sent some, including Paul and Barnabas, to discuss the matter with the Apostles and elders at Jerusalem. Upon reaching Jerusalem, they encountered Pharisees, who were strict in keeping the Law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas opposed the restrictions of these "Judaizers" vigorously. They had observed hundreds of Gentiles transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into Christians, who were fully equal in quality to the Jewish Christians. Both Paul and Barnabas were sure that the only thing needed to make a man fully acceptable to God was divine grace, and this was given Jews and Gentiles alike as a result of faith and nothing but faith in Christ.

Apostles Present Evidence

Acts 15:6-21 The apostles and elders came together to study the question. After much disputing, Peter gave his experience with Gentiles. God gave them the Holy Ghost, **even as he did unto us. He put no difference between us and them.** Yet Jews were circumcised and Gentiles were not. God purified **their hearts by faith**, not by circumcision. Why **put a yoke upon the neck**—bind a burden—which the Jews were not able to bear? Even if it had not been hard to keep the works of the Law, this could never have made them perfect.

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Peter concludes that all, both Jews and Gentiles, shall be saved only **through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ**.

Barnabas and Paul, like Peter, gave their experiences, not their opinions. As they had gone preaching, God had used them to save many Gentiles and to do miracles among them. This could not have been accomplished if all God's requirements had not been met.

James took the facts that had been given and connected them with prophecy (**Amos 9:11-12**), given about eight hundred years before. God promised to **build again the tabernacle of David**—figurative language meaning to raise up a means of salvation—and that the Gentiles would **seek after the Lord**. This was strong evidence. God promised to save Gentiles, and He had saved uncircumcised Gentiles. James reasoned from this that God did not require circumcision for salvation. Then why should men require it? Nothing further is required. He suggested the contents of a letter to be sent to the Gentile church at Antioch.

Were the Apostles in Jerusalem heads of the church with authority to rule in matters of doctrine? No. Let us examine and see that they did not rely on their own judgment. They considered (1) God's action in Peter's experience, (2) God's action in the experience of Paul and Barnabas, and (3) God's will as written in the Bible. When these agreed, they were confident that God had made known His decision. At no time did the Apostles legislate or make rules of doctrine. It was natural and right that the church consult with them as having more experience, having been with Jesus, and especially as having the gift of being Apostles. They submitted to the leadership of Spirit-led leaders.

The Plan Accepted

Acts 15:22-29 The apostles and elders, with the whole church—unity and equality—decided to send Judas and Silas, who were prophets (**Acts 15:32**), with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch with the letter. Seen here are a few distinguishing marks of the Church of God: (1) No man-made creed or discipline. (2) No human head of the church. (3) Unity of all in the church. Not all could go to Jerusalem. Not all could speak in the meeting. But all were interested, considered, and consulted. All rejoiced together in the way of the Lord. A difference in opinion does not necessarily mean a person is wrong in spirit.

It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us—not man's decision, yet men joined in it—to lay upon you **no greater burden . . .** Circumcision would have been a needless burden. It, being a type of purity, was unnecessary when the reality of purity was obtained in Christ. Four things they, and we also, must keep from to remain pure: (1) **Meats offered to idols**. (2) **Blood. The life . . . is in the blood** (**Leviticus 17:11-13**). Reverence for life requires us to **pour out the blood** and not eat it. (3) **Things strangled**. Strangling would retain some blood. (4) **Fornication**. Spiritual and literal fornication is a sin of impurity and keeps one from the Kingdom of God (**Exodus 20:14; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10**). What is your idol?

The Church Rejoices

Acts 15:30-31 Reaching Antioch, the brethren **gathered the multitude together**. The message was for all the church. All were equal. Reading the letter, they **rejoiced for the consolation**—for the freedom of the Gospel, rejoiced that their salvation rested not in difficult keeping of outward forms and ordinances of the Law, but in inward connection with Jesus Christ and heart purity.

We no longer live under the Law of Moses. We are not saved by keeping outward forms, ceremonies of the Law, or ordinances such as circumcision. God saves a person by doing a work in the heart. When He puts His grace into a heart, that heart lives and is saved.

JUST A THOUGHT

It is what we learn after we know it all that really counts.

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Mary Lehmann.

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