

## Sabbath School Lesson #7 – When Conflicts Arise – 10-16 November 2018

**C**hrist would have us understand that those who are His are united in Him as one. Paul reminds us of the effect of our baptism in Christ. “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27-28). There is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism,” and “by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free” (Ephesians 14:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13). No allowance has to be made for differences of race or position, or any other distinction by which the people of earth are divided in worldly things. In the church of Christ all distinctions are obliterated, and the members are all one. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female.”

Sunday: Ethnic Prejudices – “There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.” We should not confound “Grecians” with “Greeks;” a distinction is made between them in the Bible. The latter term applies to those who were natives of Greece; it is used also as synonymous with Gentile (Romans 1:16). The former term is used to designate those Jews who lived in foreign countries, and spoke the Greek language. The word occurs but two other places in the New Testament – Acts 9:29, and 11:20. In the latter instance the preceding verse clearly shows that this distinction is made. Between the native and foreign Jews there would naturally exist some of that jealousy that existed between Jews and Gentiles. The religion of Christ had broken down all sectional differences; and all classes, both native and foreign Jews, rich and poor, were as one in the belief in a crucified and risen Lord and Saviour.

“The daily ministration” refers to the daily distribution to the poor, for the common fund. Up to this time the apostles had had charge of this business (Acts 4:37), although we cannot suppose that they attended to it in person, as in that case they could hardly have had time for anything else. The fact that the murmuring was against the “Hebrews” instead of against the apostles, shows that others were deputed to do the work. The “neglect” of which the Grecians complained might have happened in one of two ways: The national jealousy between the two parties may have caused some partiality to be shown, perhaps not from deliberate design, but from long habit. But it is probable that this neglect was unintentional. The number of Grecian Jews must have been small in comparison with the natives of Judea, and their widows would be easily overlooked. The fact that they spoke a different language would add to their natural timidity, and would prevent them from coming forward to claim that which was their due. This unintentional neglect of their widows was quickly noticed by the Grecians, and they began to complain. This murmuring would soon have caused a division in the church, if left unchecked. The apostles did not claim the power to “lord it” over the believers, but called “the multitude of the disciples together,” and proposed a remedy for the difficulty. They were not willing that there be even the appearance of injustice to any one.

“It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables” (Acts 6:2). The apostles did not intimate that it was inconsistent with their dignity for them to perform this service. They were not above even physical labour, for they surely remembered the words of Christ, “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.” But they saw that the care of these matters would detract from their usefulness as ministers of the word. There were others who could do this work, who did not have the work of preaching. The minister of the gospel has to do with high exalted themes; and while he should be willing to perform any service, he should not allow petty cares to distract his mind. The “twelve” and the “seven” had different duties, but both were servants.

Monday: The Conversion of Gentiles – In the house of Cornelius, Peter said: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him” (Acts 10:34-35). There are men in heathen lands who may never have heard the name of God, or seen a line of His written word, who will be saved. God is revealed in the works of creation, and they who accept what they see of Him there are accepted with Him as surely as they who have learned much more of Him.

Tuesday: The Spirit Is Leading – The leading of the Holy Spirit in the early church was recognised by the church. “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:30-31). But it was not to Israel alone that God gave repentance through Christ. “To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). And so plainly did God make this appear that even the exclusive Jews were forced to exclaim, “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). The brethren in Jerusalem showed their connection with God by recognising the grace that was given to Paul and Barnabas. When Barnabas first went to Antioch, and saw the grace of God that was working there, he was glad, “and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 11:21-24). The other apostles perceived that God had chosen Paul for a special work among the Gentiles; and they gave to him the right hand of fellowship, only requesting that he would remember the poor among his own nation; and this he had already shown his willingness to do (Acts 11:27-30). So Paul and Barnabas returned to their work.

Wednesday: The Jerusalem Council – The issue that was faced by the church at Antioch was the new gospel that denied the power of Christ to save. The false brethren said, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye can not be saved.” Literally, ‘You have not power to be saved.’ This put all the power of salvation in the outward sign of circumcision. Paul declares, “In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love” (Galatians 5:6). Circumcision has no power, uncircumcision has no power, but faith alone, working by love, is mighty to save. What the false brethren wished to enforce was not real circumcision, for that is not outward, but in the heart, and consists solely in obedience to God’s law through faith (see Romans 2:25-29; 4:7-11).

The Jerusalem council did not have a monopoly of truth. The brethren in Antioch did not need to go to Jerusalem to learn the truth, or to find out if what they had was the genuine article. The fact that truth was first proclaimed in a certain place, does not prove that it can be found only there, or that it can be found there at all. In fact, the last places in the world to go to with the expectation of learning truth, are the cities where the Gospel was preached in the first centuries after Christ, as Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, etc. Paul did not go up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before him, but began at once to preach.

Thursday: A Difficult Solution – The matter of circumcision was discussed at the Jerusalem council and a letter sent to churches. Paul did not go up to Jerusalem in order to get a difficult point settled. He did not go up to the apostles and elders to find out whether he had been preaching the truth or error for seventeen years. Those who were leaders among the brethren “added nothing” (Galatians 2:6) to him. He had seen the Lord Jesus, and he knew whom he had believed (2 Timothy 1:12); and as he had not received the Gospel from any man (Galatians 1:11-12), he did not need that any man should teach him what it is (1 John 2:26-27). He went up “by revelation” (Galatians 2:2) of the Lord. The Lord knew that the brethren in Jerusalem needed his testimony, and the new converts needed to know that those whom God sent spoke the words of God, and all spoke the same thing – “speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you” (1 Corinthians 1:10). They needed the assurance that as they had turned from many gods to the one God, the truth is one, and there is but one Gospel for all men. The Jerusalem council had no monopoly of truth. Paul says, “Whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me; God accepteth no man’s person” (Galatians 2:6). There is no man or body of men on earth, that has a monopoly of truth so that whoever wishes it must come to him. Truth is independent of men. Truth is of God, for Christ, who is the shining of His glory, and the very impress of His substance (Hebrews 1:3), is the truth (John 14:6). Whoever gets the truth, must get it from God, and not from any man, just as Paul received the Gospel. God may and does use men as instruments, or channels, but He alone is the Giver. Every man on earth may be the possessor of just as much of the truth as he is willing to use, and no more (see John 7:17; 12:35-36). No popery in all this.