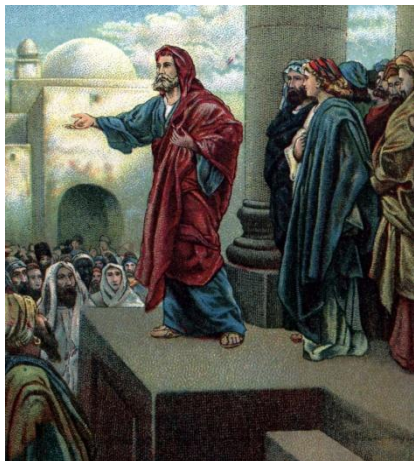


SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 8



PETER'S RESPONSE TO HIS BRETHREN

Scripture Text: Acts 11:1-18

Sometimes one has not only to carry out a project, but also to defend his action before those who question it. Such was Peter's experience after he went to Cornelius. Sometimes when our action is questioned by our brethren, we are tempted to be resentful and belligerent. It is better to assume that the critics are also desirous of doing God's will and keeping the church clean.

Those in the lesson today were. Peter kindly but frankly explained. Very recently he had held the same attitude as these brethren now held. He treated them with the same understanding God had used in teaching him. Let us look at the result as recorded in this lesson.

MEMORY VERSE: *Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?*

—Acts 11:17

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—Galatians 3:6-18 The example of Abraham.

Tue.—Galatians 2:11-21 Paul's opposition to Peter.

Wed.—1 Timothy 5:17-25 Rebuke before all.

Thu.—Matthew 9:9-17 Jesus came to sinners.

Fri.—Romans 1:8-17 Greeks included.

Devotional Reading: Luke 2:25-35 A light to Gentiles also.

The Criticism

Acts 11:1-3 The apostles and brethren . . . heard . . . Gentiles had . . . received the word. They were Spirit-filled men, yet their ignorance or mistaken belief led them to oppose the salvation of Gentiles. **They that were of the circumcision—Jews—contended with Peter.** Notice, they held their peace until they met with Peter face-to-face. They did not hash it over and form opinions against Peter on what they heard. The church needs to learn this lesson today. Their criticism was, **Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised.** Gentiles were unclean to the Israelites; they were people outside of the favor of God. **Didst eat with them—**worse. Eating together signified friendship, equality. Peter's action seemed to his brethren to be a lowering of God's standard. They felt he had been disrespectful to God's calling. Peter admitted their charges as true. They wanted the facts from Peter himself. Peter did not resent their honest criticism.

Peter's Explanation

Acts 11:4-11 Peter rehearsed the matter . . . expounded it by order—told it all plainly and explained it step-by-step. He respected the honesty of their position and with love showed the facts that they might come to an understanding of the Truth. Peter told of his vision. His explanation was not in self-defense, but in defense of God's Word. The middle wall of partition was now pulled down. The Jews and Gentiles are called to become one flock, under one Shepherd and Bishop of souls. Peter had not opened the door; God did.

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Points in Peter's Defense

Acts 11:12-17 The Spirit bade me go. (1) Peter's action was not of his own planning. It was obedience to God's Spirit. These brethren had the Spirit and understood Peter. **These six brethren accompanied me.** (2) He had witnesses. They witnessed the happening, agreed with no objection. (3) Peter briefly told of Cornelius' vision, which agreed with his own. **Call for Simon—Peter—who shall tell thee words whereby thou . . . shall be saved. Forasmuch then—since—God gave them the like gift—the Holy Spirit, as he did to us.** (4) They had obtained the gift the same way. They **believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?** (5) Peter pointed out his lack of authority in this. The act was God's, not his. Only God can send the Holy Spirit. (6) Peter plead his responsibility to God. Since God is perfect and all-powerful, Peter had no right to question His acts, only to cooperate with Him. God, Who made, at first, the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, has a right to remove it, whenever and by whatever means He pleases. Peter saw both Jews and Gentiles going to Heaven.

The Apostles' Conclusion

Acts 11:18 These brethren were servants of God; they were Apostles. Peter, a short time ago, had felt and believed as they. They did not have the authority to decide this among themselves. It did not rest in them to make rules and creeds and doctrines, to legislate for the church. They were not a governing body. That authority is God's alone. They were only servants to carry out the commands of Christ as the Spirit directed. **When they heard these things, they held their peace—**had nothing to say. They dropped all contention **and glorified God—**praised and thanked Him. They yielded to God's decision. They accepted those whom God accepted. They decided according to facts, not prejudice. They agreed that God had **granted repentance unto life** to the Gentiles.

How About Us?

The people at Caesarea had been saved by way of repentance. They did not join anything. They came in by the door, the new birth, which gave them life in Christ. God added them to the church. There is no other way to get in.

Prejudice and customs are hard to give up. We do not like to change an opinion long held or to break the common-belief bond with friends. But the operation of the Holy Spirit in the heart can change the mind also. He gives one a love for God's will above all else. These saints had the Holy Spirit. He gave them a childlike sincerity. Learning God's will meant for them the dropping of contrary opinions and brought a rejoicing in the Truth. We should judge by facts, not by what we hear. We should rejoice in the salvation of others. How about you, dear friend?

JUST A THOUGHT

There is plenty of heavenly music for those who are tuned in.

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Mary Lehmann.
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