

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

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The Plight Of Rev. Williams

By BEATRICE HERBIN

"The foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but The Son of Man hath no where to lay his head." Scriptures. In this day of scientific and humanitarian advancement in all phases of religion and education, one wonders after all why God set man above the kingdoms of the earth. It seems that all nature, to a great extent, bespeaks peace and tranquility, but man, whom God has made just a little lower than The Angels have not responded likewise. There have been numerous occasions similar to that in which The Reverend Frank Williams finds himself today, and yet, a situation wherein a man of peace can not live without being molested is barbarian in this civilized age. Man, whom God has created in His own image, and whose men are all brethren, has not learned to live together in peace and harmony. How then can he expect to live in God's Heaven, if he is unable to dwell together on earth? The 23rd Chapter of St. Matthew speaks of the admonition to follow good doctrine, not evil examples. The 28th verse reads: "Even so ye outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." Christ could be speaking these words to any community, for among the people are many "Dr. Jekylls and Mr. Hydes." In business or at a distance, the bulk of the American whites have shown friendly attitudes towards Negroes, but just dare to move into an all-white neighborhood and the other side of man comes out. This is what confronts Rev. Williams today. His home has been defaced by vandalism, by ignorant and prejudiced whites. Then there are those who stand on the sidelines and say: "It would be better if he moves out." When will those who call themselves Christians stand up for right and defend the righteous? Or do they do this only when the other party is white also?

The Gospel is just as fitting today as it was 2,000 years ago. And it is obvious that these words of Matthew's 33rd. verse might be addressed to such promoters of vandalism and hatred:

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

Throughout the history of the world, men have been persecuted and crucified along with Christ. However, Rev. Williams is not being persecuted in this instance for righteousness sake; he is being tried for racial sakes. Laws to some people mean nothing. It is indeed a pity that Negroes and whites are forced to live together in Viet Nam and remote parts of the earth when, here at home, they can not live side by side in peace.

As one military man wrote recently, "The men don't mind fighting for peace and what we believe in, but the thing that makes us feel bad is that we have to come back to America to fight another war — among our own people — white and Negro."

As Stephen, as Paul and other prophets, Rev. Williams stands to be stoned to death, yet, he has said that he will not move! This is to be admired. And the blood of his sneaking attackers will be on the souls of irresponsible witnesses.

Christ's great second Commandment says: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This means coming to his rescue in time of need as one would desire others come to him. Oh, men of earth, where is thy shame? You speak of Christian love with your lips, but your hearts are far from God!

A community should be honored to have a man of God in its midst; his coming should bring light, but in this case, the moving of a Negro minister into a white community has brought a night of treacherousness and fear, and a demand of guards to watch lest the enemy comes while they sleep.

I'd like to say to all America, to Greensboro and Guilford County, how can we win wars of peace with foreign countries, people we never come in contact with, if we can't win the wars of peace at home, among our own fellowmen?

This Week's Sunday School Lesson

God Makes No Distinctions

Purpose Of Our Study

To help adults become increasingly aware of the inclusive nature of Christianity in that all men are saved only through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Scripture

Read the lesson from your Bible: Acts 15. We print selected verses below.

Acts 15:1-11

1 But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. 3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, reporting the conversion of the Gentiles, and they gave great joy to all the brethren. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. 5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses."

6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. 7 And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; 9 and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

Memory Selection: I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. —Romans 1:16

Introducing The Scripture

Acts 15 tells of a great council of the church that convened at Jerusalem to deal with the question of the real nature of Christianity. Was Christianity to be a sect of Judaism, with all the exclusiveness and legalism implied thereby? Or was Christianity to be a free religion of the spirit of Christ? This council at Jerusalem should not be considered a general council of the entire church since only Jerusalem and Antioch were represented.

A similar council seems to be described in Galatians 2: 1-10. Whether Acts 15 and Galatians 2: 1-10 describe the same council is a debatable question. There are discrepancies between the two accounts. However, the two accounts breathe the same spirit — the spirit of a religion offering to men salvation not on the

basis of man-made distinction but on the basis of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ freely offered to all.

Interpreting The Lesson

The gospel of Jesus Christ can never be the possession of a clique or an organization or an institution. God through Christ calls all men into saving fellowship with himself. The call comes not on the basis of human merit or man-made distinction but on the basis of God's gracious love for all his children, regardless of their race, rank, position, or human worth.

The gospel is indeed "the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16) The Jews of the first century confused the fact that they had first claim to the gospel with the false assumption that they had an exclusive claim to the gospel.

A Jewish Religion?

The burning issue of the early church was whether or not Christianity would remain a sect of Judaism or become a new and independent religion. As the church spread out to the gentile world and inevitable conflict arose between the Jewish national party of the church and the advanced missionary wing of the church.

The "Judaizing" party contended that the church was fundamentally a Jewish concern and that converts to the Christian church had to become good Jews before they could become good Christians. Paul and his colleagues, who preached the gospel of salvation by faith alone, proclaimed that gentile converts need not fulfill the Mosaic requirements and could enter the Christian fellowship on the basis of their faith alone.

The so-called Jerusalem Council, referred to in Acts 15 and perhaps also in Galatians 2, attempted to determine what type of religion Christianity would be. Paul and Barnabas, infuriated with the attempts of the Judaizers to enforce Jewish regulations on the Christians of Antioch, went up to Jerusalem to discuss the question with the apostles and the elders of the church. The whole course of the Christian church was influenced by the answers given to the basic question of the relationship of the Jewish religion and the growing Christian movement.

A Legalistic Religion?

The Pharisaic party within the early Christian church contended that Christianity was under obligation to be as narrow and strict as the Jewish religion of which it was a part. These Judaizers contended that Jesus himself was a Jew and that he had kept the law and even denied any intention of destroying the law. (See Matthew 5:17-20.)

Furthermore, the Old Testament affirmed that the promises of God were for the children of Abraham. Therefore, if these gentiles were to share in the promises of God, they had to become sons of Abraham by accepting the covenant of circumcision.

Certainly Paul was not against the law as such. He realized that God's demands, as encountered in the law of the Old Testament, were for the purpose of leading men to life. The law

could serve as a school-master to bring men to Christ, but the law could not save men. No amount of good works done in response to the command of the law could save men. The law, as a matter of fact, ministered to the abortive efforts of man to achieve his own salvation, forgetting his own creaturely and dependent existence.

Paul was not so much against the law as he was against the legalistic mind. These Judaizers came down to Antioch preaching to the gentiles: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Their devotion to tradition limited their approach to the whole problem. They were sure that if all the converts did not follow the path of the Jewish converts, they were on the wrong road.

Because man is not what he ought to be and through the law he sees what he ought to be, he tries to achieve this ideal possibility through his own strength. But the power that can save man and reunite him with his true meaning in God is a divine gift and cannot be earned through the fulfillment of any laws.

Paul reacted to the narrowness and restriction represented in the Judaizers' position. He was convinced that Christianity could not be cramped or hampered by such a legalistic approach.

A Free Religion?

For Paul, the Christian church was the congregation of the free, and Judaism was under the bondage of the law. Those who were once slaves under the law had been set free and now had the rights of sons of God. Paul said to the Galatians, "Stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1)

Paul accented the free response of man to the grace of God, which had been freely given Paul had won this freedom after the frustrating slavery of meticulously attempting to obey every detail of the Jewish law in the effort to find salvation. Paul saw the work of the Judaizers as an entering wedge to rob the church of this precious freedom.

This freedom from the law did not mean license for Paul. Some of the early Christians misunderstood Paul's teaching at this point and enjoyed without restraint or without fear of guilt many worldly pleasures. But Paul did not mean that Christians were to live below the law; he meant that they were to live above it in a new freedom in Christ Jesus.

A Working Religion?

When Paul and Barnabas went up to the Jerusalem Council, they did not argue the question by attempting to prove abstract propositions. They simply told the story of their successful mission to the gentiles and of God's apparent favor upon their efforts. Peter also reminded the leaders of the church how God had granted his Holy Spirit to the gentiles. Had God not shown Peter that nothing made by God could be considered unclean or inferior?

One of the greatest tests of Christianity has been the pragmatic test. Christianity works. Christianity saves and redeems and brings new life.

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