

## Sunday School Lesson

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The authority of Paul and Barnabas was not the authority of ordination. Their authority was that of the effective working of the Spirit of God in their own lives. The church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem as "men who (had) risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 15: 26) Their religion was not a formal, theoretical religion but a working, practical religion.

Halford Luccock in commenting on this passage wrote:

"Churches have been eager for the specious authority of wealth and social position. They lose sight of the only authority which speaks with a compelling voice, that of service and sacrifice, of hazarded life in a world of need."

## An Inclusive Religion?

The Book of Acts leads us to believe that the Jerusalem Council ended in some sort of compromise on the issue, giving Paul all the liberty he needed for his work among the gentiles but restricting the Jewish converts to the observance of the Jewish law. However, Paul's

statements in Galatians do not reflect the spirit of compromise. For him the new freedom in Christ was absolute, and there was no going back to the former bondage under the law.

Paul did on occasion accept some Jewish cultic requirements in order not to offend conservative members of the church, but the fact remains that the Jerusalem church decided against circumcision as a requirement for the gentile converts and thus cut Christianity free from legalistic hindrances. "For I thought the law died to the law, that I might live to God." (Galatians

2:19) "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5: 1)

Paul saw in Christ far more than a Jewish Messiah; he saw in Christ the Savior of all mankind, Greek as well as Jew. For Paul, Jews had no more rights than did the Greeks or the barbarians. No one nation had "an inside track." "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one

in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3: 26-28)

For Paul, Christianity was not a law to obey but a Christ to follow. For him, Christianity was not a sect of Judaism but the Body of Christ, of which all men could be members through faith.

## What Do You Think?

Why do men try to establish requirements and standards for membership in the church? How did Paul's understanding of the requirements of membership differ from that of the Judaizers? Do any of our own church's re-

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