



Sunday School Lesson

Subject: Good News for Former Enemies
Date: April 10 Scripture: Acts 11:2-18

INTRODUCTION

Two unmarried sisters inherited the old family homestead when their parents died. They lived together in peace for several years, but one day they had a disagreement that soon led to a heated dispute. The dispute was so sharp that they refused to speak to each other, but even this barrier did not satisfy them. Through a third party they decided to build a dividing wall through the house. Each sister had her own, separate bedroom already, but the living room, dining room and kitchen were divided in half by a wall. This created something of a problem in the kitchen because the pump was on one side of the wall and the cookstove was on the other. But even this serious inconvenience was not great enough to break down their stubborn pride and so they managed to get along. The sister with the stove walked several hundred feet to a neighbor's house for water while the sister with the pump cooked her meals on a little charcoal burner.

Then one day tragedy struck. One of the sisters had a stroke that left her paralyzed and speechless. She had no way of summoning help from her sister who was only a few feet away, though on the other side of the wall, and so in a few hours she died. The living sister, realizing that her stubbornness had contributed to her sister's death, was so conscience-stricken that within a few weeks she also died.

Prejudice and stubborn pride bear bitter fruit, yet many continue to harbor these feelings even when they suffer as much as the victims of their prejudice. The Christian Jews in Jerusalem certainly had strong feelings against all Gentiles, feelings that had festered across the years and had been intensified because they now had to bear the yoke of Gentile oppression. We ought not be surprised that they immediately questioned Peter's actions in baptizing the Gentile Cornelius and those of his household. Yet we can rejoice that when they heard Peter's account of the situation and how his actions were authorized by the Holy Spirit they were willing to accept these Gentiles as Christian brothers. Had they done otherwise, Gentiles would have been sentenced to spiritual death and their own spiritual death would have followed shortly.

The outdoor bulletin board of a church once carried this attention-getting announcement: "The seven last words of the church—We've never done it that way before." How true! This has been the slogan of every reactionary party in the church since Pentecost. Reactionaries view suggested change in the program of the church as a treat and they resist change with all the strength they can muster.

The leaders of the circumcision party in the church at Jerusalem qualified as charter members of this movement. We don't know who was in this group, but they represented one of the most reactionary elements in the Jewish society. When they became Christians, many things about them changed, but still these traditional attitudes remained. As Christians they were still suspicious of innovations and close association with Gentiles was certainly an innovation to the traditional Jew. They would, no doubt, greet such an action with "We've never done it this way before."

If this group had succeeded in coercing Peter to retreat from the position that the gospel of salvation was for all men regardless of race, then the church would have been terribly limited in its outreach. Further, most of us would never have had the opportunity to hear the good news. We can be thankful the views of these reactionaries did not prevail. And, we can be thankful that reactionaries did not prevail in other situations. For example, at one time the reactionaries violently opposed the translation of the Bible into the language of the people. In their opposition, they even went as far as to martyr those who worked to give the Scriptures to people. Sunday School, when it was first introduced, was considered a threatening innovation.

The church, if it is to meet the challenge of today, must be willing to change. Of course, its basic message, grounded in the revealed Word of God, must never be twisted or remodeled for the sake of expediency. Yet, whatever method the church uses to preach and teach the unchanging gospel, it always must be subject to change and improvement.

"Tradition, Tradition," is the yearning cry of the hero in the musical play "Fiddler on the Roof." All of us have felt the solid comfort of old ways and have resisted change in one degree or another. Peter needed a revelation, a God-given vision, to even dare to share the gospel with the Gentiles.



Eddie Knox
...Charlotte Mayor

Eddie Knox Announces

Eddie Knox, a former state senator and now mayor of Charlotte, officially announced his candidacy as a Democrat for governor at an early morning news conference attended by hundreds of hometown community and business leaders.

Following his remarks in Charlotte, Knox, 46, was to fly to Asheville, Greensboro, Raleigh, Greenville, Wilmington and Elizabeth City, with the same message to local governmental officials, educators, area leaders and news reporters.

Jobs, education and crime were listed by Knox as the three most critical issues facing North Carolina. As he outlined his approaches to meeting those issues, Knox spoke of his success in accomplishing public goals. "It's now time to take my style of leadership to the people of North Carolina," he said. "Working together, we will develop a progressive platform that will move North Carolina to the destiny she deserves."

During the past 20 years, Knox gained great respect from political parties, the business community and

neighborhood leaders for his commitment to public service and the forthright manner in which he worked with people. He achieved a reputation of doing what he set out to do. His success was attributed to an exceptional ability to bring people together, hear their views, develop workable solutions to problems, and then see that appropriate action is taken.

Currently serving his second term as mayor of the state's largest city, Knox pointed to his record as mayor, as a two-term state senator, as chairman of the state's Advisory Budget Commission, and as a leader on numerous other state and local committees in saying, "I did what I promised to do." That is the same philosophy he says he will carry to the governor's office.

Prior to making his announcement, Knox spent more than two years traveling throughout the state, listening to people's concerns and seeing their problems first-hand. What he heard and saw has become the foundation for his plans to help North Carolina cope with rapidly changing times.

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