

## Sunday School Lesson

By Bessie Wilton

### INTRODUCTION

Man has a moral nature. This is one of the things that distinguishes him from the rest of God's creation. Constantly making choices, man is responsible for the consequences of his actions.

We continually seek to hide our evil behind something or other. We call it "salving the conscience." Some make a gift to a worthy cause or charity in an attempt to restore our self esteem. We should know better. Certainly God knows better for He is not to be bribed in any such fashion. Benevolence is no substitute for righteousness.

Nor is education. A generation of schooling without training in morality and ethics will result in a society devoid of integrity. Some of the most notorious criminals are among the best educated, the results being that their crimes are only more sophisticated.

### INTRODUCTION

The prophet Amos deals with these points in our lesson. What does God desire? Certainly more than just a show of religion: more even than acts of worship directed to Him. That which God desires becomes a basic issue for all of life, and we will do well to give our attention to it.

The climate of today's lesson was one of peace and prosperity; there was a feeling of euphoria. Were they not enjoying rich blessings from the Lord?

The true condition of Israel may be stated in the words of another prophet, Isaiah, who said, "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me," (Isaiah 29:13). Because the lives of the people were corrupt, their praise was mockery and they would fall under the condemnation of God.

"Listen to this, you women of Samaria, who grow fat like the well-fed cows of Bashan, who mistreat the weak, oppress the poor, and demand that your husbands keep you supplied with liquor.

"Make it your aim to do what is right, not what is evil, so that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty really will be with you, as you claim he is. Hate what is evil, love what is right, and see that justice prevails in the courts. Perhaps the Lord will be merciful to the people of this nation who are still left aside."

The Lord says, "I hate your religious festivals; I cannot stand them! When you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; I will not accept the animals you have fattened to bring me as offerings. Stop your noisy songs; I do not want to listen to your harps. Instead, let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry," (Amos 4:1; 5:14, 15, 21-24).

It is deplorable to observe depravity in any human being. For some of us it is sadder still when a woman abandons all decency and degrades both herself and womanhood by adopting vile habits. We do not believe in a double standard of morality - one for me and another for women, but could it not be that many women are quick to adopt the vices of men in order to attain or prove their equality?"

Far from feeling any pity for the suffering of the impoverished, these pampered darlings cared nothing about the abuse and exhortation by which their husbands extracted their wealth from the poor. They only knew they wanted more, and it made no difference to them what their husbands resorted to to provide for the fulfillment of their desires.

Israel, though founded "under God," was far from being a godly nation. Blessings had been hers. God had been good to His people. He had sent His prophets to instruct and when necessary, to warn. He had been patient. When Amos prayed, God even postponed the time of judgment upon the land. God certainly had not abandoned His people. It was they who had forsaken the Lord, they who had taken a wrong turn. Still a positive note was sounded. God would receive them back into His fellowship if they would accept His invitation.

Seek good; not religious platitudes, or abstractions, but do good and practice justice and fairness in all of life. With some, goodness is negative, a code of "Thou shalt nots." With others, it is a pious attitude. But goodness is more than refraining from something, more than temperate living, more even than praying. In the biblical sense one cannot be good; he must do good. In the case of these people who stood before the prophet, it was a call to show active concern for the abused and the underprivileged, to relieve the poor, and to correct the injustices of society. If the people of God within a nation will not do this, then who will?

The word seek involves effort. We are such creatures of habit that we are not going to drift into new endeavors that may be called good, and drifting is usually in the opposite direction. Without decisive action our good intentions will get us nowhere.

What does God want? Some would answer that He wants sincerity, and surely we would not deny that. But it is an error to consider sincerity to be the most significant element of acceptable worship. To say that it does not matter about one's beliefs and practices as long as he is sincere is nonsense. One may believe a lie to the loss of his soul, and dreadful things have been done by people who were sincere.

Let justice run down as waters. As an arid land is made to blossom and brought to fruitfulness by overflowing waters, so would the overflowing of justice in Israel bring new life for all. We give lip service to such commitment each time we quote our Pledge of Allegiance: "With liberty and justice for all." But do we live it? Are we concerned about it and do we work for it?

How much injustice and wickedness can a nation endure and still survive? Is there a limit? To what degree can the home be degraded, the courts and legislation courts corrupted, and financial institutions defrauded? How many of our youth can we give up to dope and alcohol? How many prisoners can we provide for at \$25,000 per year? Just what percentage of a nation can become crooks, from shoplifting to mob violence to murder, before judgment strikes, whether from a fire of its own making or from a direct act of God?



Bertha Ferguson, a member of the Deborah Chapter No. 424 Order of the Eastern Star and Rameses Court No. 78 Daughter of Isis, recently received the Deputy's Outstanding Service Award for Organizer and Overseer, Emeritus, during the 33rd annual North Carolina Council of Deliberation held in Winston-Salem, N.C. Officially known as Loyal Lady Ferguson, she was the first Organizer and Overseer appointed to the Mountain Region by Deputy G. Wesley Allen, M.D. 33 degrees. A Past State Grand Organizer and Overseer, Loyal Lady Ferguson is a member of Zack Alexander Assembly No. 35 Order of the Golden Circle; she is a Past Loyal Lady Ruler and is currently the financial secretary of the Assembly. Additionally, Ferguson serves as chairperson of the fund raising committee and is the adviser to the vice president of the Mountain Region. A member of Harmony United Methodist Church in South Carolina, where she serves as the chairperson of Council of Ministries as well as chairperson of Worship, Ferguson is married to Ill. W. H. Ferguson, 33 degrees, and they have three children and four grandchildren.

### June Proclaimed As Rape Prevention Month

To increase public awareness of precautions against sexual assault, Governor James G. Martin has proclaimed the month of June as Rape Prevention Month.

Rape continues to be one of the fastest growing violent crimes in North Carolina. The most recent annual Uniform Crime Report indicated that reported rapes have increased in North Carolina by almost 65 percent since 1976. Research indicates that only 10 to 50 percent of all rapes are reported to law enforcement.

In his official proclamation, Governor Martin said, "I urge all citizens to seek preventive information for themselves and their children.

"I also urge all state and local officials involved in the criminal justice system to devote special attention to the prevention of these crimes while redoubling the efforts to make our system more responsive to the needs of their victims," Martin stated.

Community agencies and local rape crisis centers are preparing for the coming summer months when the reported incidence of sexual assaults is at its highest. According to "Crime in North Carolina," a publication prepared by the N.C. Department of Justice, most rapes occur during the month of June, followed closely by the month of August.

The same study shows that rapes most frequently happen in the victim's home on the weekend and that women between the ages of 16 and 20 are most frequently the victims. Statistics also show that rapes most often are perpetrated by someone the victim knows.

Rape crisis centers and other community agencies across the state are planning a number of events in June to create a greater public awareness of this problem, raise funds, train volunteers, and to teach self-protection techniques.

The Rape Crisis Center of Asheville will sponsor a conference on "Providing Assistance to Victims of Sexual Assault" on May 31 in Asheville. Other events planned include the third annual Sunset 5K run on Saturday, June 1, in Raleigh; a film festival in Wilmington; daily spots on rape prevention on WFMV-TV in Greensboro and WGHP-TV in High Point; and a series of self-defense programs in Orange County.

"The rape crisis programs are providing an outstanding service to local communities," said Betty J. Budd, director of the N.C. Council on the Status of Women. "Sexual assault prevention is just one component of this multi-faceted program," she added.

According to Budd, these programs also provide 24-hour crisis intervention, victim advocacy, counseling and volunteer training and community education. She said, "Without these programs and the support that the staff and volunteers provide, victims would find that trauma of rape to be immeasurably worsened.

For more information or printed materials contact Cindi Dorman,

N.C. Council on the Status of Women, 526 N. Wilmington St., Raleigh, N.C. 27604, 919-733-2455.



When you know you're special, it shows. Just by looking at the pleasant facial expressions of Martin Wilkins and Asha Hood, you can tell that they're special. They were recently honored King and Queen at E. C. Cannon Cathedral Daycare. (Photo by Ricky Sampson of Divine Reflections)

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