Contemporary Comments on the Adult Sabbath School Lesson

[Title] Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles
[Use] October 1, 2011

When a church member approached her pastor, declaring that she would have to stop holding Bible studies in her home, this is how the conversation went:

“That’s too bad,” said the pastor. “Why?”

“People are coming and smoking in our house,” she complained.

“So?” asked the puzzled pastor.

“It’s stinking up our new drapes,” she fussed.

“Do you want sterile drapes,” asked the pastor, “or do you want to expose hurting people to the love of Jesus?”

That pastor was Jerry Cook, author of the book, Love, Acceptance & Forgiveness.1 Pastor Cook believes that every church should be a place where love is active. And active love means accepting people. He uses Jesus as our example. Jesus didn’t spend His time isolated in the synagogue. In Cook’s words, “Jesus spent His time with dirty, filthy, stinking, bent sinners.” In fact, He mixed with sinners so often that the self-righteous got upset about it.

Cook believes that unreserved acceptance should become a habit in our churches. He wrote:

“When love, acceptance and forgiveness prevail, the Church of Jesus Christ becomes what Jesus was in the world: a center of love designed for the healing of broken people and a force for God.”

The early church was certainly a force for God. But as we learned in this first lesson of the new quarter, some members had problems being accepting. The lack of acceptance didn’t come because the Gospel was now available to the Gentiles. But rather on what conditions they should be allowed to join the church.

Some strongly believed that faith in Jesus was just not enough. They argued that faith wasn’t complete unless circumcision and obedience to the law of Moses were added to it. A Gentile could never be called a true Christian unless they were circumcised.

Paul wanted to open wide the doors of the church. He wanted to welcome anyone who wanted to come on the basis of faith in Jesus alone. Not everyone had to be exactly the same in order to be accepted. Yet Acts 15:1 says that some believers came from Antioch and declared, “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This greatly upset Paul
and Barnabas who began to debate with them. Ultimately, the Jewish counsel sided with Paul. Yet the opposition continued.

How is it with our church? Are we accepting of outsiders who come to visit or want to join? Do we accept them just the way they are? Perhaps we need to be a little more patient in teaching new believers. Perhaps the most important thing should be faith in Jesus first. Perhaps we could follow the example of the believers in Judea. When Peter told them about his vision, this is what happened: “When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’”

~ nc

Additional resource: Testimonies on acceptance from the ICON church in San Diego, CA
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXmfw2QE9C8


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