

The University Heights Messenger

February 28, 2010

The Church At Antioch of Syria--6 Eager To Please God

As we continue our examination of the church at Antioch of Syria, we come to their single greatest attribute--an unbridled desire and willingness to please God. Acts 15 sets the stage for one the more interesting and insightful portions of Scripture. Some men came from Judea to Antioch and began to teach that the Gentile Christians there, and that would have been the vast majority of the membership, needed to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses besides their baptism to truly be saved (15:1).

The words of these men would have carried weight to those Gentile Christians for at least three reasons. **First**, the gospel was originally presented in Judea and it is from there that these men have come. **Second**, the apostles themselves were from Judea and had begun their work there. **Third**, the men bringing this teaching claimed to be Christians themselves. Though they were of the party of the Pharisees, they were called believers in verse 5. Also, they were willing to put this question to the apostles and the elders, something an ordinary Pharisee would never have been willing to do. In **Galatians 2:4**, Paul calls them false brethren who had slipped in to spy out the freedom they enjoyed in Christ Jesus. At any rate, the Antioch Christians would have been disturbed by what they heard from these men and desperately wanted the truth on the matter.

A quick point to mention here: the truth had already been presented on this topic. Paul was not making his teaching up as he went along. He was guided by the Holy Spirit as he taught (**Galatians 1:11-12**). Thus, the Jerusalem council was not gathered to *decide* if Paul was preaching truth on this subject. Rather, they had gathered to *affirm* that what was already being taught was the truth. The only decision the council made that had not already been decided by the Spirit was to write a letter to the churches addressing the issue

and to send certain men to deliver and accompany it. This letter was to go first to Antioch of Syria and spread to other churches from there (15:22-23).

Acts 15:30 says, "**So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.**" You can picture the eager anticipation of the entire congregation as they prepare to hear what the letter contained. If they were not truly Christians because they had failed to adhere to certain portions of the Law of Moses, they would have been crestfallen but instant in their attempt to correct the oversight. They wanted to know that they were saved and pleasing to God. It's why they had been troubled in the first place and why they had all gathered as one to hear the contents of this letter.

Upon hearing what the letter contained, verse 31 shows us their response. "**And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.**" Their salvation was complete! The men who had troubled them, though claiming to be believers, were wrong! They were not to be subjected to the very burdensome rites and ceremonies of the Law of Moses! Is there any wonder they rejoiced?

May we take any lessons from our first century brethren in this? Most assuredly. They understood that the Holy Spirit was speaking through the apostles thus they could not have been more eager to read what these men had to say. They could not have been more eager to follow the apostles teaching (**Acts 2:42**) because they understood that it was ultimately *God's* teaching. Thus, when a letter from the apostles was sent to them, the entire congregation gathered in eager anticipation, understanding that instruction and direction in pleasing God was sure to follow.

You and I also have within our possession several letters from the apostles. Does our eagerness match theirs? Does our desire to please God burn as fervently as theirs? Am I as interested in hearing God's will expounded upon as they were? We have just

such an opportunity multiple times each week. We have the opportunity to be taught God's will in song, through sermons, and in Bible classes. This congregation offers so many opportunities for you and I to grow as Christians and better learn the things that please God. Let us take advantage of them to the very best of our ability. Ultimately that is what God requires--our very best.

There is no question in my mind that those Christians at Antioch would have made any change necessary as set forth in that letter to ensure that they really were sound and saved. Am I willing to make such a change when God's Word tells me I must? I have never been as frustrated, discouraged, and shocked as I was when a man who had spent more than 50 years as a Christian, as we examined the Scriptures to note a vital change that needed to take place in the behavior of the congregation, told me that those Scriptures were merely "idle words." Yet some thought shows that he simply put into words what Christians sometimes express through their actions and behavior.

These letters that we possess are so much more than mere words. They are *God's* words. They instruct, encourage, and teach us how to please Him. Let's take advantage of every opportunity to hear them taught and explained. Let's be as eager as our brethren an Antioch of Syria.

IN NEED OF PRAYERS:

Jim Edwards and **Esmeralda Agustin** are struggling' spiritually.

Sister **Glenn Kimberlin** is shut in.

Megan Davis' grandmother passed away. Let's remember Megan and her family.

Rachel Crawford's aunt, Gail Stein, is in the midst of her treatments for breast cancer.

Bill Morelan's mother passed early last week.

Taylor Osterling had a tracheotomy and remains hospitalized on a ventilator.

Shannon Gilbert is receiving treatments for breast cancer.

Rachel Knollman's continues her cancer treatments.

Robert Brundige, Richard's brother, is in Parkside Manor in Cynthiana dealing with some issues. **Sarah** Brundige, Richard's mother, is in Cambridge Place Nursing Home and in need of our prayer.

Let's also remember **David Day and his wife, Michelle Oxendine, Ron Catchen, Chuck McDavitt, and David Blakeman.**

UPCOMING EVENTS:

The informational meeting will be today at 4:45. Please make plans to attend.

BIBLE READING SCHEDULE FOR 1/7-13:

Sunday: Ex 2-3, Ps 26, Mark 5

Monday: Ex 4-5, Ps 27, Mark 6

Tuesday: Ex 6-7, Ps 28, Mark 7

Wednesday: Ex 8-9, Ps 29, Mark 8

Thursday: Ex 10-11, Ps 30, Mark 9

Friday: Ex 12, Ps 31, Mark 10

Saturday: Ex 13-14, Ps 32, Mark 11

SERMON TOPICS:

Sunday AM. **The Eldership--2**
Work of the elders

Sunday PM. The spiritually mature

CLASS INFORMATION:

We will begin this morning in lesson 11 at IV. Your participation has been tremendous and is much appreciated.