

HOME BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Numerical & Spiritual Growth of the Church

- 1 - Through a Renewal of Vision
- 2 - Through Lifting up Christ
- 3 - Through A Spirit of Unity
- 4 - Through a Spirit of Outreach
- 5 - Through a Benevolent Spirit
- 6 - Through a Spirit of Hospitality

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2007

Lesson One

"Through a Renewal of Vision"

(2 Cor. 5:17-21)

Have you stopped to analyze why children ask **"Why?" so much?** Could it be that it is a learning process? But even more, they are looking for reasons, meaning, or purpose behind things. Adults also want to know **"Why?"** probably because we are rational, thinking, and reasoning beings. Also, we ask why because there needs to be a reason behind things that we do. It seems that when adults or teenagers lose all meaning or purpose for their life, they lose hope and often end their lives. We need purpose and meaning for living. Successful people are such because they have purpose and they pursue that purpose.

We believe the same is true of the church! We need meaning for our existence as a congregation of people. We need to ask some very important questions, such as: *"Why does this church exist?"; "What are we suppose to be doing?"; or "How well are we doing it?"* When numerical and/or spiritual growth is not seen in a congregation, it is probably because they have lost sight of their vision.

DO WE NEED A RENEWED VISION?

Congregations have a tendency to drift away from their purpose at times. Jesus evaluated the seven churches of Asia and notice how he pointed out how they had drifted:

- Rev. 2:4 _____
- Rev. 3:15 _____
- Rev. 2:5 _____

Occasionally, we need to be reminded of the main purpose for which we exist. We need to catch anew that vision Jesus placed before His followers long ago. The church does not need a new purpose or mission. It doesn't need a new doctrine, nor a new Gospel. We need to go back to the old purpose, the original one given by Jesus. We need to see it clearly and vividly and have it impressed upon our minds and hearts. We then need to zealously pursue the fulfillment of that purpose. We need to focus on it and eat, sleep, and envision how we can fulfill it properly.

THE ORIGINAL PURPOSE

Jesus gave the marching orders to His Apostles and they gave the same purpose to the church:

Matt. 28:18-20

This is what we refer to as the "great commission." This is an imperative command and not an option for us. God intended for us to clearly see and understand our responsibility and find ways to fulfill it. The following is a brief analysis of this commission:

"Go"—In my daily activities of life to the lost in a pre-determined effort to reach out to lost people.

"Teach, Preach the Gospel"—With the intent of making them devoted followers of Jesus. To help them become learners of the Word of Life so they may receive eternal life. To give them opportunity to hear the Good News.

All Nations—Teach all peoples, nations, groups, countries. Not just in my own backyard, but everywhere there are people. The Lord allowed the early church to be persecuted in order to scatter them and spread the Gospel message everywhere they went (Acts 8:4).

"Baptizing them"—This act of submission brings a person into Covenant relationship with God. It is an act of faith that brings remission of sins. It is an act necessary in order to become a part of the family of God.

"Continue to teach"—To nurture, mature, equip, edify the new disciples. Help them to become obedient in all things. Help them to take their place in the work and mission of the church.

Our mission is really a two-fold one:

1. **To evangelize:** To reach out and impact the world about us. This is primarily dealing with Salvation, Reconciliation, and the kingdom of God. Evangelism is leading one into the kingdom of God.
2. **To nurture:** It is then to show a concern for "our own." It is to stress the quality of life that the Christian should live. It is to help them in making application of the teachings of Jesus so that they can mature and be equipped to serve in the kingdom.

Christianity is more than just being saved from past sins. It is to take a lost person and transform him into the image of Christ. It is a process of learning to rethink everything in the light of God's truth. It is learning how to get along with other Christians, as well as other people. And at the same time, we live as God's agents in the world to represent God at home, at work, at school, and in the community.

2 Cor. 5:20

FULFILLING OUR MISSION

There is something very basic that we must understand about our mission— Salvation is a **Divine/Human** effort!

1. The Divine part—It is to realize that Salvation has been provided to mankind at a great cost to God. It is summed up in this one verse:

2 Cor. 5:21 _____

2. The Human part—It is to realize also that man must appropriate this salvation to himself. Man plays a part in this great drama of life. God does not force salvation upon man, it is something that he must desire from God.

Acts 2:36-38 _____

We also need to realize that fulfilling our mission is a cooperative effort on the part of God and man.

1 Cor. 3:9 _____
John 17:18 _____
2 Cor. 4:7 _____

God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present! He is neither helpless nor weak. But, He has made Himself dependent upon His people to take the Gospel to the lost. He relies upon us to undertake His affairs in the world. God wants committed people:

- a) Whose lips He can used to speak through;
- b) Whose hands He can used to serve through;
- c) Whose resources He can use to build up His Kingdom.

Salvation through Christ **DOES** depend greatly upon human effort!

Rom. 10:14 _____

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

God expects of us to be good builders and not shoddy builders. He wants the best workmanship of which we are capable (1 Cor. 3:10). The church will grow both numerically and spiritually when we become the right kind of workmen! We need to be people of great faith in God, who are committed to the task to be done, and who will let God's Word direct our activities. We need to be a people

that God can work through to bring the lost into His Kingdom. Are we this kind of people?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is ask the question "Why?" a good thing to do?
2. Why do people need meaning and purpose for their lives?
3. How did God indicate some of His people had drifted away from their purpose?
4. Do we need a new vision or a renewed vision?
5. What was the original purpose of the church?
6. What is the two-fold nature of this purpose?
7. What is another way of expressing our purpose, as found in 2 Cor. 5:20?
8. What is a very basic understanding we need to have of our mission?
9. With whom are we working in the carrying out of our mission?
10. Why do we need to be good builders?

Lesson Two

"Through Lifting up Christ"

(Numbers 21:1-9)

The event in the above verses took place while Israel journeyed in the Wilderness in the land of Edom. It was a long, hard, hot, hostile, and discouraging trip. They began to complain against Moses and God. Israel had a real struggle with trusting in God. So, God sent fiery serpents among them to punish them. Many of the people died. They penitently pleaded with Moses to speak to the Lord on their behalf. He did, and this was God's way of dealing with their unbelief—He told Moses to make a serpent of brass, put it upon a pole, and whoever is bitten needs to come and look upon that brass serpent in order to be healed. Why did God use this means? Two possible suggestions come to mind:

1. **To serve as a test of their faith.** It emphasized the need for their faith to be obedient to God. To claim to believe and to show it is two different things. It possibly humbled them also to have to come and look upon a brass serpent to be healed. But it was God's way to provide mercy to them.
2. **To pre-figured something in the future.** God had plans of a redeemer to come that could heal the nations of their sins. Jesus claimed to be that redeemer!

John 3:14-15 _____

John 12:32 _____

The brass serpent pre-figured the death of Jesus to save a lost world.

WHY LIFT UP CHRIST?

Note that the emphasis in the two Scriptures above is on the death of Jesus, not His life, that will draw men! Jesus lived an ideal life! He was serene, poised, and balanced in life. There was an absence of a sense of guilt (Jn. 8:46). He spoke with authority and they sensed it (Mk. 6:2; Lk. 4:22). He was tender, compassionate, and concerned with those who needed such. But He was firm and condemning to those who needed such. Jesus was referred to as the "friend of sinners" by his enemies! Children were attracted to Him (Matt. 19:13-15). He taught as no man had taught before (Matt. 7:29). He lived as no man had ever

lived before. Yet, Jesus said: *"If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to me."* The emphasis is on His death that would serve as the great drawing power.

Why are men drawn by the death of Jesus?

1. Because it manifested the greatest love of God for mankind.

John 3:16 _____

John 15:13 _____

Rom. 5:8 _____

2. Because it showed the great justness of God in forgiving sinners. Man not only knows he is a sinner (Rom. 3:23), but that he deserves punishment for his sin (Rom. 6:23). God's Law demands death and the penalty must be paid! Jesus paid that penalty for us so we can escape the punishment of our sins.

Heb. 2:9 _____

Heb. 2:17 _____

God has lifted us from the depths of sin and death and made us sons and daughters of His.....because Jesus suffered and died in our stead!

SOME OBSERVATIONS

1. Even on the cross, its effects were felt! Women who watched Jesus die wept at the sight of such an unjust death. Others smote their breast in sorrow and fear. The thief on his cross was brought to repentance. The Centurion in charge of His crucifixion stated: *"Surely this was a son of God."*

2. When Jesus is lifted up before men, they can look upon Him and be healed! Men are brought to the realization that Jesus is dying for **MY sins!** He is my means of escape from my deserved punishment. It is not hard to see the strong magnetism and pull of the "crucified Christ!" No wonder the Apostle Paul stated: *"I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."* (1 Cor. 2:2).

3. There is a paradox about His death to the Jewish people. They thought His death would stop His influence and so they cried for Him to be crucified. But Jesus pointed out: *"Crucify me, and I will draw all men unto myself."* And the emphasis is....Men are Drawn, not Driven! We are drawn because of such great love, mercy, and justness!

OUR OBLIGATION

What is our responsibility as redeemed people? If the drawing power is in His being lifted up, then we must lift Him up! Men need to be called upon to look upon the Crucified Christ. Every creature is to have depicted before his eyes—Jesus' death on the cross! Such is the power of God to save those who will believe it!

What a privilege we have to carry such a message to lost men. What great satisfaction to tell such a message to dying men and women. What great joy there will be in heaven as sinners are drawn to Jesus. What a great "light-bearing" church we can be to this community—and even to the world.

We have within our hands, heads, and hearts the greatest message of hope that men can ever hear. It has the greatest drawing power for the salvation of man's soul. We have the greatest mission as the people of God to take this message to the whole world. The only thing lacking is....

**Redeemed people who will "lift up Christ"
before the world!**

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As redeemed people, let us do our work well and with diligence! If you are reading this lesson and are not yet redeemed, may we encourage you to look upon Jesus and realized that He died for you and not Himself. Then, realize the great love it took for Him to be willing to freely offer Himself as our sacrifice for sin. Would you open your heart to Him for He stands at the door of your heart wanting to come in. God requires that a lost person must believe in Him and His Son, repent, and upon being immersed in water, you will be forgiven and made a part of the kingdom of God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What was Israel's besetting sin?

2. What are some possible reasons why God used the brass serpent to heal the people of the snake bite.

3. Is the drawing power of Jesus in His life or in His death?

4. What can happen when Jesus is lifted up before the eyes of men?

5. What does the death of Jesus show about God's love for us?

6. How does the death of Jesus show the justness of God?

7. Were people affected by the death of Jesus at the time of His actual death?

8. What is one of the paradoxes connected with the death of Jesus in regards to the Jewish people?

9. What is our obligation in regards to the death of Christ?

10. What does God require that a lost person do to be saved?

Lesson Three

"Through a Spirit of Unity"

(1 Cor. 1:4-13)

A spirit of unity is important to the well-being of the church as well as its growth. Its importance is seen in the following admonitions:

1 Cor. 1:10 _____

Eph. 4:1-3 _____

There is an obvious reason for its importance. When there is tension and divisiveness in the local church, it makes it almost impossible to grow. But on the other hand, where there is unity, there is health, strength, and vigor to help make the church grow.

THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

The church at Corinth can help to illustrate the importance of unity. This church had several problems in their midst: Divisions, immorality, members going to court with one another, problem in their marriages, questions about eating meat offered to idols, and even some were doubting the resurrection. What was all of these problems doing to the church? Their strength was being spent on opposing one another, rather than dealing with the real enemy. Satan was achieving a great victory in the very church set up to destroy his works. The church had gotten away from what it should have been. They needed to be restored back to what God had made them to be:

1 Cor. 1:1-9 _____

REQUIREMENTS FOR UNITY

Verse 10—*"that you all speak the same thing."* Listen to the Word of God and accept only it. Listen to the inspired teachers and their message.

1 Cor. 14:37 _____

Those who are speaking a different message must stop. All are to speak the same truth—God's truth or the "one faith" (Eph. 4:4-6). Unity of message must be restored.

Verse 10—"that there be no divisions among you." There are to be no factions or splits within the church. Cliques or groups were forming around certain teachers in the church. It was wrong and needed to be stopped. Such action is the work of the flesh.

Gal. 5:20 _____
2 Cor. 12:20 _____
1 Cor. 3:3 _____

Teacher's egos love the praise of men. They enjoy the statement: "*You do a better job than so-and-so.*" It is easy to begin to form parties around such people. Paul reminds them of a very important concept in verse 13 of 1 Cor. 1—There should be only one party in the church—the "Christ party!" All were brought into this body because Christ died for them. All were baptized into one body by the authority of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:38). He offers this rebuke:

1 Cor. 4:6 _____

Verse 10—"that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Factions, parties must be removed! Individuals must come together as one group, not several factious groups. Strife must end so there can be a harmonious spirit in your midst. You need to have the same judgment when decisions are made in the area of judgment and not a fragmented situation. Base your decisions upon the attitude, thinking and actions of Christ.

OTHER PASSAGES ON UNITY

Phil. 1:27, 2:2-3. There were admonished to stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel. They needed to be like-minded, having the same love for one another. There needed to be of one accord and one mind. Strife and self-seeking for personal glory are to have no place among you. You are to esteem others better than yourself. You need to be concerned for the interest of each other.

John 17:20-21. The church is to strive for the ideal unity like there is between the Father and the Son. Unity comes first of all through our submission to the Will of God in our lives. And we need to hold strongly to this spirit of oneness and not divisiveness. If each of us has the mind of Christ and holds to what He

says, we will all speak the same things and there will be a wonderful, harmonious spirit at work in our midst.

Titus 3:10-11. One way of dealing with division is to reject, have nothing to do, with a divisive person. He is one who advocates a different message or a different spirit. This is strong language, but it is important that we take heed to such!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The value and importance of Unity and Harmony is easily seen and understood. It is easily illustrated. What one man can't do by himself, one or two more can accomplish by working together. One stick is easily broken, but when tied together with several stick, it is very hard (if not impossible) to break the bundle of sticks. Sticking together or working together can definitely have great value. If the church is to grow, we must work together—for it is a big job to be accomplished.

The Word of God calls for Unity; it gives principles by which this Unity can be maintained and enhanced; and it condemns those who will not help to keep this Unity among brethren. It should be obvious that Unity in the local congregation rests upon the willingness of individuals to let the Word of God be the final authority in religious matters. It also depends upon a willing spirit to work for the ideal Unity among us. And, as well, it also requires that we deal with one another lovingly—especially with those who would threaten this Unity.

The story is told about a herd of wild mules that were being often attacked by a pack of wolves. When attacked, they would become frightened and began to kick. The wild kicking of the mules did more damage to each other than the wolves. An older mule called them together and said: *"Brother mules, we have been killing as many of our fellow mules as the wolves have been killing. If we would all just put our heads together and kick at the same time, we could kill of these wolves and we would not be hurting each other."* They all thought the advice was great. So, the next time the wolves attacked, the wolves were killed and not one mule was hurt. I am sure that we have as much common sense as these mules did! You have heard about "Mule Sense" have you not?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is it important for the church to be unified?

2. What does Unity provide for a church?

3. How did inspiration deal with divisiveness at Corinth?

4. How can God's people be of one mind and judgment?

5. How do you esteem others better than yourself?

6. How we can have unity like the Father and the Son?

7. What is to be done with a divisive person?

8. What does Unity in a congregation rest upon?

9. How does a herd of wild mules illustrate the importance of Unity?

10. What does the expression "Mule Sense" mean?

Lesson Four

**"Growth
Through a Spirit of Outreach"
(Acts 8:1-4)**

Who wants to become a member of a church that is fussing and fighting all the time with each other? Basically, only those who like to fuss and fight! But, we are talking about things that help the church to grow, both numerically and spiritually. Not only do we need a renewed vision of our purpose; but as well, we need to be unified. Then, the world around us need to seen our concern for those who are lost—that we are busy seeking and saving the lost. That is what we mean by the title of this lesson—Growth through a spirit of outreach! People need to know that we care—that we do not want them to be lost! If we do not reach out and teach the lost, the church will die—but so will the lost die in sin! If souls are lost because we didn't care, then it is possible that my own soul may be lost as well. The church desperately needs a spirit of outreach in our midst!

THIS SPIRIT EXISTED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Scriptures that indicate such:

- Acts 2:47** _____
- Acts 4:4** _____
- Acts 5:28** _____
- Acts 5:42** _____
- Acts 6:7** _____
- Acts 8:4** _____

The spirit of outreach was so evident in their midst! Everyone was talking about the message of Christ. People were becoming Christians constantly. The lost were being saved and the church was growing—both numerically and spiritually! Wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to recreate this same spirit among us today? We certainly need to make a diligent effort to do so!

**TWO IMPORTANT REASONS FOR HAVING
THIS SPIRIT IN OUR MIDST!**

1. The Church's survival depends upon such! When you hear people talk about a church being dead, that doesn't necessarily mean that they no longer exist as a group. It does mean that they are not growing! Churches will either grow or they will die! Sardis was in that position.

Rev. 3:1 _____

They still existed as a group, but they were not growing. Live Churches are growing!

2. So that the Lost can be Saved! The following questions are crucial:

- a) Are our friends, neighbors, and co-workers lost?
- b) Am I convinced that my loved ones are in danger of eternal punishment?
- c) Is it possible that good, religious people can be lost?

And of course the real issue is: **"Who does God indicate are lost?"** The following Scriptures point this out clearly:

Rom. 10:1-3 _____

2 Thess. 1:7-9 _____

Acts 2:47 _____

Col. 1:13-14 _____

Mk. 16:15-16 _____

Rom. 1:18 _____

John 8:32 _____

We first must realize why people are lost so that we will know who needs to be reached out to. What do I do when family and friends do not believe the truth of God? Do I stand firm on truth? Or, do I compromise truth? We should be tolerant of other's rights to believe as they so wish, but at the same time we realize that that doesn't make it right! We should not deny truth, nor give it up to make people happy.

2 Tim. 3:6-9 _____

2 Tim. 4:2-4 _____

The only way that men can be made free (saved) is through believing and obeying God's truth (Jn. 8:32). The words of eternal life flow from Jesus (Jn. 6:68). And, Jude tells us that we should earnestly contend for the faith that has been once for all delivered to mankind (Jude 3).

WHAT WILL ABOUT OUTREACH?

He says to DO IT! (Matt. 28:18-20). All Christians need to be, must be, and can be involved in reaching out to the lost! A basic way is in how we live and conduct our lives!

1 Pet. 3:15-16 _____
John 13:34-35 _____
Phil. 2:15 _____

While all do not have the same giftedness that others do, we all can have a concern for the lost and do what we can as an individual and as a part of the group to reach out to the lost. Our effectiveness can become better as we continue to grow as Christians (2 Pet. 3:18). When we don't grow to the point where we can help teach others, we need the following rebuke:

Heb. 5:12 _____

Passing the torch on from generation to generation is very critical for the very existence of the church.

2 Tim. 2:2 _____

We have all heard and responded to the Good News from Jesus. What do we do with it—hoard it or tell it to others? When we offer the excuse that I can't teach others, we need to be reminded against that God said for us to go and do it—and that is what he intends for us to do! Christians are to learn to teach others within a reasonable period of time. We grow from "babes" to an "adult" Christian. Our transformation should prepare us to speak to others about salvation in Christ. Jesus emphasized:

John 15:1 _____
John 15:5 _____
John 15:8 _____

Fruit bearing depends upon our being in Christ. Fruit bearing is something that is naturally expected of the branch. It is unnatural for it not to bear fruit. Jesus makes it clear that:

1. Fruit-bearing is an essential element of the Christian;
2. It determines whether a person is truly a disciple of Jesus;
3. Fruit-bearing is not an option.

Jesus also warns those who do not bear fruit:

John 15:2 _____
John 15:6 _____

The Christian is always seeking opportunities to reach out to others with the Gospel. We know that not everyone will receive it, but some will!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As this spirit of outreach was obvious in the early church, so should it be obvious in our midst today! Our words and actions should show it. The use of our money, time, and talent should indicate such. We need to see saved people added to the church in our midst. Do we have such a spirit among us?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. What is meant by having a "spirit of outreach?"**
- 2. How did the early church show this spirit?**
- 3. Why should we be concerned about having this spirit in our midst?**
- 4. What are the kinds of people whom God says are lost?**
- 5. What does God say about outreach?**
- 6. What is so important about being "fruitful?"**
- 7. How can we show our concern for the lost around us?**

Lesson Five

"Through a Benevolent Spirit"

(Deut. 15:7-14)

One of the beauties of the Old Testament Law that God gave to Israel was the detail on how to carry out a command. The above passage illustrates this. God not only commanded the Israelites to help the needed, but the Law goes into detail (not only in this passage, but others as well) on how and why that help is to be given. The Apostle John records a very important concept that has to do not only with this subject, but with our outreach as well.

John 13:34-35 _____

If we are not concerned with the needs of our own "brethren" in the Lord, it is certain that we will not really be concerned about the lost either. And, if the lost see that we are not concerned about the needy among ourselves; then, what incentive would he have to want to become a part of our group or fellowship? The world needs to see that we "love one another!"

FOUR BENEVOLENT PRINCIPLES

1. They were to have the right kind of heart towards the needy!

Deut. 15:7 _____
Deut. 15:9 _____
Deut. 15:10 _____

2. They were to open their hands up to the poor!

Deut. 15:7 _____
Deut. 15:8 _____
Deut. 15:11 _____

3. They were to be liberal in their giving!

Deut. 15:12-14 _____

4. Benevolence was to be a way of life! It was not something turned on and off, but continuous (Lev. 19:9-10). What was their motivation for this way of life?

Deut. 15:15 _____

To be thankful people helps us to be benevolent! Why do Christians not give properly? Is it also that they are not thankful for their redemption? Have their hearts become hardened by unthankfulness and covetousness?

**THE EXAMPLE AND TEACHING OF JESUS
CONCERNING BENEVOLENCE**

Jesus was actively involved in helping people. His motivation is indicated in the following passage:

Matt. 9:36 _____

His example of benevolence:

Acts 10:38 _____
Matt. 20:28 _____

His teaching on benevolence:

Acts 20:35 _____
Matt. 19:16-22 _____

Luke 10:25-37 _____

Jesus' exhortation.... "*Go and do likewise!*"

**TEACHING AND EXAMPLES IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS**

Tit. 2:14 _____

Eph. 2:10 _____

Heb. 13:16 _____

1 John 3:17 _____

Gal. 6:10 _____

The early church were helped to see the need for benevolence and such actions are recorded for our admonition.

Acts 2:44-47 _____

2 Cor. 8:1-5 _____

The Apostle said of the churches of Macedonia that their willingness exceeded their ability. They wanted to give in spite of their poor condition. They looked upon giving to help their brethren as a privilege.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Our eternal destiny depends upon our being a benevolent people—according to Jesus:

Matt. 25:41-46 _____

Jesus made it clear that showing our love for one another is our way of showing our love to Jesus!

Edwin Markham, in his little story about the Cobbler, has uniquely illustrated this concept. The Cobbler dreamed that Jesus was going to visit his shop the next day. So he got up early, spruced up his shop and prepared a meal to receive Jesus. He waited and waited, but only an old man came asking if he could rest. The Cobbler saw his shoes were worn through, so he fixed him a new pair and let him go his way. That afternoon, an old woman with a heavy load of firewood came by. She was weary and needed rest and food. The Cobbler gave her food, and when refreshed, went on her way. As evening shades were coming, the Cobbler despaired of Jesus' coming. But then, a lost child came to his shop crying bitterly. The Cobbler left his shop to take the child home. He returned to his shop disappointed that Jesus did not come. He would have done anything for Jesus if He had come. He cried out: *"Why is it, Lord, that Your feet delay? Have you forgotten that this was the day?"* Then soft in the silence a voice he heard: *"Lift up your heart for I kept My word...I was there three times and you treated me well!"*

What a blessing God's benevolent people can be, not only to one another, but also to those about us. How bright is our light shining from our good works?

Matt. 5:16 _____

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is John 13:34-35 so important in regards to our study on having a benevolent spirit?

2. What are four benevolent principles given in Deut. 15:7-14?

3. How did Jesus show His concern for needy people?

4. What outstanding teaching do you remember that Jesus gave in regards to benevolence?

5. What is significant about 1 John 3:17 in regards to benevolence?

6. Who should we, as individuals, and as a group be willing to help?

7. How did the early church show their concern?

8. How did the Macedonians show their concern?

9. Does our eternal destiny depend upon our being benevolent?

10. Who is glorified in our good works?

Lesson Six

"Through a Spirit of Hospitality"

(Acts 16:11-15)

People are getting away from being hospitable. It is fast becoming a "lost art!" Several reasons may be given for such, but it seems to be obvious that we have become too busy and involved with our own things, families, and close friends that we do not reach out to others. Lydia (Acts 16) had grown up as a Jew. They were taught to practice hospitality. And upon her being converted to Christ, she extended hospitality to Paul and those with him.

Acts 16:15

She showed a wonderful spirit to these men and it was definitely a great help to Paul and the work these men were doing.

BIBLE EXAMPLES OF HOSPITALITY

Pricilla and Aquilla. (Acts 18:1-3). They were Jews and tentmakers by trade. They had been forced to leave Rome and had come to Corinth. Paul came into contact with them at Corinth. Paul also had a trade that he had been taught—tent making. So, they invited Paul to stay with them and work with them. We later hear of them being in Ephesus where the church was meeting in their home (1 Cor. 16:19). They are next mentioned at Rome where the church was meeting in their home also (Rom. 16:3-5). They were hospitable people!

Lazarus, Mary and Martha. (Luke 10:38-42). They were known for opening up their home to Jesus and His disciples. They showed their love for Jesus by their hospitality. Their relationship was very close through such contacts.

Hospitality in the early church. Someone has observed: *"Hospitality became a virtue indispensable to the well-being of the early church."*

Acts 2:46-47

Christians opened their homes and shared their meals with other Christians and built a strong unified group. The church also extended this kindness to traveling preachers which helped the spread of the Gospel. Most Christians had to meet in homes at first until other arrangements could be made.

Acts 9:43-11:18 _____

Acts 16:15 _____

Rom. 16:23 _____

Tit. 3:13 _____

ADMONITIONS TO HOSPITALITY

Rom. 12:13 _____

This admonition was given in the midst of such exhortations as:

- a) Let love be without hypocrisy (v. 9).
- b) Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another (v. 10).
- c) Distributing to the needs of the saints (v. 13).
- d) Given to hospitality (v. 13)

1 Peter 4:9 _____

Such acts of kindness could have been costly and inconvenient at times, but God wants us to do this without murmuring. It should be offered as a gift of love.

Hebrews 13:1-2 _____

This probably has reference back to Abraham. And who knows when we will unwittingly do the same! The Greek word, "Philoxenos," is literally "a lover of strangers!" It is extending kindness to those we are not intimately acquainted with. It is opening up our homes and sharing what God has blessed us with.

1 Timothy 3:2 _____

This statement is repeated again in Titus 1:8 as a quality that needs to be in the life of an elder in the church. They serve as examples to the rest of the flock in this respect.

WHY BE HOSPITABLE?

Some basic reasons:

- 1) Because God has commanded it.
- 2) It shows my love and concern for others.
- 3) It often fills a desperate need.
- 4) It blesses the giver (Acts 20:35).
- 5) It is good stewardship of what God has put into my care.

Because of the Value of it:

- 1) It can serve as an avenue to reach those who are lost.
- 2) It can strengthen new members in particular.
- 3) It can draw God's people closer together by breaking down barriers.
- 4) It can meet benevolent needs.
- 5) It can give a reputation of friendliness to the church.
- 6) It can cause the church to grow.

SUGGESTIONS

What can I do personally:

- 1) Look for opportunities to be hospitable.
- 2) Think about whom you need to invite into your home.
- 3) Try to make your home a welcome haven for all.
- 4) Observe how others practice hospitality.

Special suggestion. A church in New Jersey was trying to involve the members in being hospitable. They set aside March as Hospitality Month. They then encouraged every member to invite someone into their home during the month. They requested that it be someone they were not well acquainted with. Invite them in for a meal, or for ice cream and cake, or something light. But they really wanted the members to make a special effort to open their homes up to others. There just seems to be something good about being in one another's homes.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

My wife and I have used our home all of our married lives to reach out to others about us. We believe it has paid rich dividends in our lives and the lives of others. We hope you will consider seriously this command of our Lord.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How did Lydia show kindness to Paul and the workers with him?
2. How did Pricilla and Aquilla show hospitality to Paul?
3. How did Lazarus, Mary and Martha show hospitality to Jesus?
4. How did the early church show hospitality?
5. What does the Greek word for hospitality mean?
6. Why be hospitable?
7. What are some values of being hospitable?
8. What can I do to show hospitality?
9. What do you think about having a hospitality month?

