IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL

SUNDAY SCHOOL Lesson

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(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

Lesson for November 29

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THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

LESSON TEXT—Matthew 18:15-17; Acts 1:8; 2:42; 6:1-4; 11:27-30; 13:1-3; I John 1:3.
GOLDEN TEXT—As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.—John 20:21.

The church is the greatest institution in all the world, with the most widespread membership and influence. That is true from a purely secular or worldly standpoint. Then when we realize that here is more than a human organization, for it is in fact a divine organism; that it is the means through which God is now manifesting this power toward men, we see the supreme importance of understanding the church and our relationship to it.

This week we stress the mission of the church. We note seven things.

I. Holiness of Life (Matt. 18:15-17).

In a time when general standards of decency and honesty are low, and no one wants to be his brother's keeper, the church needs to be reminded that part of its mission is to maintain holiness in life and the relationship of one to another.

Notice that man's attitude toward his fellowman is first a matter for personal attention, then it becomes of real interest to the church, and if no response is found there, the offending individual is excluded and put in the hands of God. Be sure to observe that all this is done to "gain" or win him back, not for revenge or in bitterness.

II. Witness in Divine Power (Acts 1:8).

The witness bears testimony to that which he has experienced, and in the case of Christian experience he is assured of divine power in carrying out his sacred task.

The world would have laughed (and possibly did) at the idea of a small group of humble believers making the gospel effective simply by telling others about the Saviour—but it worked, because God's power was in it.

III. Unity in Faith and Practice (Acts 2:42).

The early church had not yet been split up by the philosophies of men and the vagaries of doctrine, which have since divided God's people. It was His purpose that His people should be one in Him, something we should recall before we divide them just to promote some theory of interpretation.

Unity is not only a matter of belief, it must reach into the practice of daily life. They were steadfast not only in doctrine, but in communion and prayer. A bit more unity there might bring us closer together in belief.

IV. Service, Spiritual and Social (Acts 6:1-4).

The church rightly put the emphasis on the spiritual. The leaders who had gifts for ministry of the Word did not permit themselves to be diverted into social service. Too many in the church have failed at that point. Even the good may be the mortal enemy of the best.

At the same time the early church did not neglect social needs. Men were appointed to care for them. In all too many instances the modern church has failed to minister to the social needs even of its own people and has weakly (and one fears gladly) turned them over to social agencies. What a pity!

V. Love—in Deed as Well as in Word (Acts 11:27-30).

Talking about the need of others, wishing them God's blessing, saying a desultory prayer asking God to bless and help them, is not sufficient, in fact it is not Christian at all (see James 2:14-17).

Love acts. It gives. It serves. It proves faith by works. It translates the gospel into a language an unbelieving world can understand.

VI. Obedience to the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3).

God has certain plans for the work of the church in the world, and be sure that they are no small or indifferent plans. His mighty agent in bringing His will to pass in the world is the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. If the church will respond to His guidance and be subject to His control, the work of God may go on unhindered. But just there, Christian friends, the church has most ingloriously failed.

The early church was directed of the Holy Spirit to set apart Paul and Barnabas for the work of missionaries and evangelists. Knowing as we do the marvelous results of their ministry, we shudder at the thought of what might have happened if the church had disobeyed the Holy Spirit that day!

VII. Fellowship (I John 1:3).

Here is the great secret of spiritual life and growth—Christian fellowship. And notice with care the place for it **is in the church.** If we do not come to the church we deprive ourselves and others of the opportunity for fellowship. The matter of church attendance (and twice on Sunday is not **too** much) needs to be put on our consciences lest we by our absence bear an anti-church testimony before our neighbors. But even more important is our own need of fellowship with God's people.

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"Off side!"

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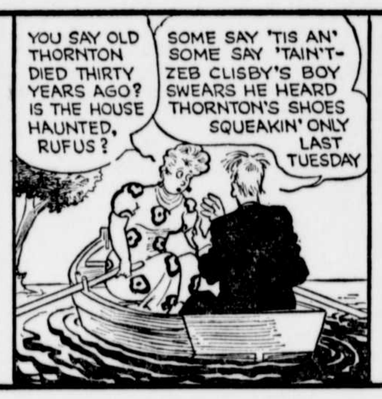

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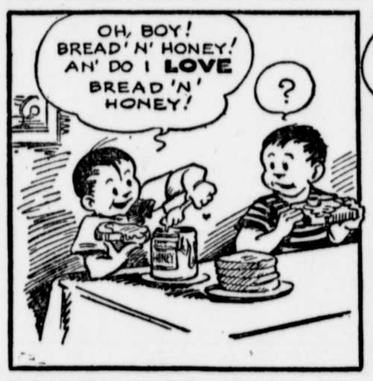

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