

THE CHURCH: A COMMUNITY OF LOVE

All Activity Sheets

KEY WORDS

ACCEPTANCE PREJUDICE FAVORITISM COMMUNION SEPARATION IMPURE

BIBLICAL REFERENCE

Acts 10:1-48

LESSON OBJECTIVE

To help the preadolescents understand God does not favor certain people; therefore, we must learn to overcome our prejudices and show love to all, even to those who are different from us

MEMORY VERSE

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"
(Matthew 28:19-20, NIV*).

PREPARE YOURSELF TO TEACH

Like all people, preadolescents also experience prejudice and rejection in two ways: (1) prejudice shown towards them and (2) prejudice they experience towards other people. Also, like the rest of us, they find it easy to identify with those who are most similar to them in meaningful ways. This can lead them to ignore and even mistreat those who are different. Your students need to recognize this trend and work to avoid it, and begin to understand that it is easy for us to overcome prejudice if we try with God's help.

We often grow up with certain ways of seeing people, and we may not even notice that our views are prejudiced. Usually, it requires God's help to overcome these attitudes. In any case, the Church must be quick to welcome all kinds of people. Christians should be ready to share the Gospel with everyone. They must also welcome everyone into their fellowship, no matter how different they may seem, either because of their race, their culture, their social or economic status, etc.

While teaching this lesson, be sensitive to group members who may experience more prejudice than others. Encourage them to talk about their experiences if they feel comfortable doing so. This will help other preadolescents begin to understand how

harmful prejudices are and the rejection and pain they cause.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Chapter 10 of Acts is a dramatic chapter that shows how barriers are broken down. It helps us to see a new vision or picture of the Kingdom of God.

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus gave Peter the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven (16:19). Now in Acts, we see Jesus unexpectedly open the doors of the Christian faith through Peter to many “outsiders.” In Acts chapter 2, we see the doors open for the Jews, and now in chapter 10, the doors of the kingdom are completely open to the Gentiles.

Certainly, this was a dramatic development in the life of the new Church because maintaining identity was a very serious matter for the Jewish people. The openness offered was a huge commitment by the Church. Today, eating a pork or marrying someone of another nationality or race may not seem important. But these matters were of the utmost importance to the identity and survival of the Jewish nation and the new Church.

But where would all this change lead? Peter had no idea; he only knew that the Holy Spirit guided him. By following the men sent by Cornelius, the apostle showed himself to be open to the Holy Spirit. Verse 28 says, “He said to them: ‘You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.’” The Holy Spirit does not neglect the Law of God, but widens the boundaries created by human beings.

At one point it was clear that the issue was not about impure food, but about impure people. We may ask ourselves: Why did God allow them to become “pure” Jewish Christians and “impure” Gentiles? God, in fact, is calling all people to his table, to share bread and have communion in his name.

These events can raise a tricky question: how can we include all people as God does and, at the same time, make the church a godly community?

The only way to answer this is to ask ourselves some questions:

How do we know when the Spirit of God leads in a new direction?

Which of the “old rules” are important to keep?

Which of the “old rules” are no longer needed?

If we’re guided by the “old rules,” do we show favoritism to some and reject others?

Peter’s audience changed, but his message did not. He preached to Jews and Gentiles the same message: the need for faith in Christ Jesus to be saved. Cornelius and his family were Gentiles, yet “pious and God fearing” (10:2). After this meeting, it became clear that Cornelius, while being a Gentile, was acceptable to God and did not need to convert to Judaism. However, his own righteousness was not enough; he simply needed, like each one of us, to give his life to Christ.

Those who are different from us today are in the same situation. The different color of their skin, culture, or language, does not disqualify them from becoming Christians.

The good news is that if we follow the Holy Spirit, God will take care of all the details. If we preach the Gospel to all people, the faith community (the Church) can deal with the diversity of those who respond to God.

INTRODUCE THE LESSON

Important words

Write the following words and their meaning on large cards or poster board. Explain each word so that the students understand them when you teach the lesson. You can write them in such a way that students can decorate or color them. Leave enough space in the letters for the students to work. Once finished, place the signs with the words on the mural. Say: “All these words are not only related to the early Church, but to the Church today.”

Acceptance: showing love to others for who they are. As Christians, we must show love to all people, even those who are different from us.

Communion: fellowship as a result of having things in common; unity among all who believe in Jesus.

Separation: distance, absence, out of contact with another person, stop being friends, etc.

Impure: according to Jewish law, certain foods were prohibited, foods the people could not eat.

Surprise!

Give the group Student Activity Sheet #403-A (Surprise). Ask them to discover words that are good surprises (love, acceptance, and fellowship) or bad surprises (sin, separation, impurity). Say: "In life we often have bad surprises that we cannot avoid. But there are bad surprises that we can change, such as sin, separation, and what is impure. If we give our lives to the Lord, bad surprises can turn into good surprises. We all like good surprises. In today's Bible story, we have two important characters who got a good surprise from God. The Lord led them to love each other, to accept and have communion with each other. This experience was part of the Church in its first steps."

Distribute Student Activity Sheet #403-B and #403-C.

TEACH THE LESSON

New friends

Today's story is a narration based on Acts 10:1-38. Involve students to assist as these characters: Narrator, Angel, Cornelius, Peter, 2 Servants, 1 Soldier and Voice.

Narrator: There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, who was a centurion in what was known as "the Italian Regiment." He was a God-fearing man. He always helped the needy and prayed regularly. One day, an angel appeared to him and said:

Angel: Cornelius!

Cornelius: (looking at him fearfully) What do you want, Lord?

Angel: We know that you pray and give to the poor. Send some men to the city of Joppa to bring back a man named Simon, who is called Peter, to come stay at your house. Peter is in the house of his friend, also called Simon, a tanner. His house is by the sea. Peter will help you and answer many of your questions. He will tell you what you should do.

Narrator: Cornelius didn't wait. He obeyed, and sent two servants and a soldier to Joppa. The next day, while they were on their way to Joppa, Peter went up to the roof to pray. Peter's stomach began to make noises, he was very hungry. Without a doubt, the lady of the house was cooking and Peter smelled the aroma of the food. While he was waiting for his meal, Peter had a vision. He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was being let down to earth by its four corners. Inside the sheet there were all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Peter had no idea what this all meant. Then he heard a voice say:

Voice: Get up, Peter, kill and eat.

Peter: Lord, no; how can you ask me to do something like that! I've never eaten anything unclean or impure!

Voice: Look Peter, listen carefully, don't call anything impure that God has made clean.

Narrator: This happened three times; and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. While Peter was wondering about the vision, the men who had been sent by Cornelius arrived at the door and asked for Peter. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Don't hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." Peter went down from the roof and went to the door to see who was looking for him.

Peter: Hi, I'm Peter. Why are you looking for me? What can I do for you?

Servants and Soldier: Cornelius, the centurion, is a man who fears God. He told us that he received instructions from an angel. He wants you to come to his house so he can hear what you have to say.

Narrator: Peter was very kind and hosted them at his friend's house; they ate together and talked that afternoon. They rested and the next day they got up, had breakfast and left for the home of Cornelius. But the interesting thing is that Peter was not alone; he was accompanied by some of the Jewish believers from Joppa. No doubt everyone was curious to know why Cornelius, a Gentile, had sent for Peter! When they arrived, their eyes had a look of surprise. Cornelius was waiting for them along with his close friends and relatives. When Peter arrived, Cornelius came out to meet him and knelt at his feet. Peter didn't want Cornelius to worship him.

Peter: Stand up, Cornelius. I'm only a man myself ... You well know that is against our law for a Jew to visit a gentile. But God showed me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. That's why, when you asked me to come, I came without objection. So here I am! How can I help you?

Cornelius: Peter, let me explain. Three days ago at this time I was praying at home, suddenly I saw an angel standing before me, and he told me to look for you so that you could teach me. Then I did what he told me. Now we are all here in the presence of God to hear everything he has commanded you to tell us. Without a doubt, you have a lot to teach us.

Peter: I now understand the vision that God gave me! Yes, it's true, now I understand that God doesn't show favoritism, but accepts from every nation those who fear him and do what is right! God sent a message to the children of Israel, announcing the gospel of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what was happened throughout Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism that John preached - how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. You've heard about how he did good and healed all those who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him!

(Narration based on Acts 10:1-38)

Read Acts 10:1-38. Then ask the following questions, allowing time for the students to respond:

1. Do you think that what Peter and Cornelius did was good? Why?
2. What does it mean to respect people?
3. Do you think that Peter and the other believers in Joppa accepted Cornelius, his family and his friends?
4. How do you think this special story ends? Do you want to know? (Read Acts 10:44-48.)
5. What does the Lord want us to do with all people?
6. What was the surprise that Peter and Cornelius received?

CONNECT THE LESSON

New friends!

After the dialogue and learning about the events between Peter and Cornelius, allow the preadolescents to respond with their opinions to the questions on Student Activity Sheet #403-C according to what they read and heard.

Ask the students to answer the questions at the bottom of the Bible story.

Can I Enter?

Pass out Student Activity Sheet #403-D (Can I Enter?). Ask the students to circle the people they think deserve to enter the castle and complete the sentence: (All) those who accept Jesus as their Savior can enter the castle (heaven)! It does not matter what language they speak or what nationality or race they are.

PRACTICE THE MEMORY VERSE

[Download Additional Memory Verse Activities PDF](#)

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Go and make disciples

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). Read the biblical text to the group. Emphasize the italicized words and ask:

Of whom should we make disciples? (all nations, all people)

How? (By helping people become followers of Jesus, baptize them, and teach them)

We are to make disciples of whom? (of Jesus)

Ask: "Is there anyone who is excluded from this plan of God?" (no) "So if this is true, how should we treat people who are different from us?" (With love, compassion, and respect. Some are already our brothers and sisters in the faith through Christ, or are possible candidates who will accept Jesus as their personal Savior.)

I will be with you

We continue with the memory verse of this unit. Now they'll learn the second part of the text, but review the first part. In this and the next session they'll learn the rest of the biblical text and the reference.

First part: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the

Holy Spirit ...”

Second part: “... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

At the time of memorization, write the second part of the text on the board. Repeat with the students several times. Divide into two groups. Then give a blank sheet of paper to each group and pencils to each child. The first child will write the first word of the text, immediately pass the paper to the next child who will write the second word; and so on. The team that finishes writing the text correctly is the winner. Prepare some prizes for the child who learns it by heart. In the first part of the text there are 25 words. In the second there are 24 words plus the reference.

WRAP-UP

Pray

Ask the students to pray and ask the Lord to help them love all people, even if they're different from them. Pray for your group so they can proclaim the Gospel to all people.

Encourage

Tell them to remember that God does not “favor anyone,” that he loves us all equally. God wants to be our Savior, no matter our race, the color of the skin, the language we speak, the social status we have, or the studies we have taken.

Invite

Say something interesting about the next session to encourage the students to attend. Remind them that their friends are welcome.