

Aim of lesson

To learn from the example of the early church about solving problems and arguments.

Bible background

Acts 15.

Outline of lesson

Ask the class if they can remember when they last had an argument or disagreement with someone. What was it about; how did it end? Tell them that in today's lesson you are going to look at some teaching from God about handling disagreements.

Jerusalem and Antioch

Using the large map remind the class of the two churches at Jerusalem and Antioch. Ask the class if they can tell you the main difference between the two churches. Bring out that the Jerusalem church would be made up of Jews, and the church at Antioch had both Jews and Gentiles.

Look together at Acts 15:1-3. Use the worksheet to clarify the problem. Some of the Jews thought that the Gentiles had to become Jews before they could be saved.

The students could record in the arrow the decision of the church at Antioch to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to talk to the apostles and elders about the problem.

Discussion

Ask the class to note the different speakers in the discussion as you read together v4-21. You may like to allow the class to interrupt to name the speakers as they occur in the reading. They can then discuss which figure on the worksheet represents Paul, Barnabas, Peter, James and the believers from the Pharisees' Party. They can then label the characters and discuss which sentence best represents what each person or group said. Note that it was the whole church which took the final decision, though James (probably the Lord's half brother) obviously took a lead in summing up the conclusion of the discussion.

Ask the class to look back at the discussion to see what was important to the speakers in reaching a decision. Bring out that they considered what God had taught them in the past by what he had done (giving the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles) and by what he had said (James quotes the prophet Amos and his words about the Gentiles coming to God). Their aim was not to win the argument and defeat the opposition, but to find out what God wanted them to do.

What to do about Mark

Read together v22-41. Note that Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement to settle as well. They could not agree, so they decided to travel separately. Barnabas took John Mark and Paul took Silas. The class may like to think why each would feel as he did. Did Barnabas think John Mark ought to have another opportunity? Did Paul think that the Lord's work needed someone who was wholehearted and would not turn back? The disagreement was obviously resolved at some future time as we find John Mark with Paul later (Colossians 4:10).

Discuss with the class the last two points in the workbook. Use them to emphasize the right attitude of being willing to listen and discuss without anger, and to consider God's view of the situation as the one that matters.

Digging deeper

Find out about John Mark and Silas

By looking through the New Testament we can piece together more about these two men, and see how consistent scripture is.

Relevance to our lives

Ask the class to try to put the principles of this lesson into practice during the week when someone disagrees with them, and remember to ask them how they get on next week.

This lesson is also suitable for reminding the class of the importance of Bible reading so that we know what God has done in the past and can apply the lessons to the present.

Prayer

The class could add to the prayer sheet a prayer about learning to be peace makers.

Other suggestions for activities

The class could make a recorded interview of the views of the different people at the discussion. It could take the form of a 'news programme'