



# My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

## Lesson #16: "Sunday in the New Testament"

### To Pledge Allegiance

Our lesson this week is called "The Sign of Allegiance to God." Why, someone may ask, would there be a sign of loyalty to God? Doesn't He know already whether or not we love Him? What kind of a sign is it? Is there a battle going on? Are there different sides to be taken? Is there a need for a sign showing which side a person is on?

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden displayed the sign of their allegiance by their choice to partake of the forbidden fruit. Perhaps it seemed arbitrary for God to pick a tree and tell them not to eat of it. It certainly didn't fit into their logic. But signs of loyalty are of necessity arbitrary or they would not be a sign at all. Colors for flags are arbitrarily chosen and a meaning assigned to them. Think of the yellow ribbons that were arrayed around the country to welcome the U.S. hostages home from Iran a few years ago. An arbitrary meaning was given to that act symbolizing how glad the nation was to have them returned safely.

Many stories have been told of patriots who have risked their lives to keep the flag flying high. The sight of the U.S. flag still bravely flying through the night at Fort McHenry, in spite of the fierce attack upon it, inspired Francis Scott Key to write the Star Spangled Banner. The flag could have been hauled down and a white one signifying surrender raised in its place and the fighting would have stopped. But the courageous soldiers were not willing to give up that flag for the sake of peace. They were willing to give up life itself to remain true to their pledge of allegiance.

A flag is only a piece of cloth. There is very little real monetary value in it. Why would people risk their lives to keep a particular piece of cloth waving in the breeze above their fort? It is because the flag represents something of far more value than just the threads in the cloth. That flag proclaimed boldly to the world what they stood for. To pull it down would have signified a change in their allegiance, and they were not willing to give up their liberty.

There was a young man a few years ago, a runaway, who found himself looking for a sign. He wanted a sign that would show him that someone loved him. He was an independent sort of fellow. He found that as he lived with his loving parents that rebellion was growing in his heart. He didn't want to put up with the restrictions they placed on him. He didn't like the way they always seemed to interfere in his affairs. Finally, one night, he decided he had had enough. He walked out.

He didn't allow himself to think of the agony he would be leaving behind him in the hearts of his parents. He was determined to have a good time. He found a job and life seemed to be going well. He had plenty of friends and no one to interfere.

After a while however, life in the fast lane began to seem empty. He was unable to suppress the thoughts of his parents. They began to seem more and more dear to him. He wondered how they were faring and tried to imagine what they thought about him. He could picture his father's furrowed brow

## Lesson 16: Sunday in the New Testament

and almost hear his strong voice. He imagined a disapproving look on his mother's face. "They will probably never want to see me again," he thought.

Thoughts of home came more and more frequently 'til he finally decided to write a letter and see if they cared to see him again or not. Soon after writing the letter the young man boarded a train. The destination was home. He was dreadfully nervous. As he rode, he clenched and unclenched his fists. His jaw worked nervously. His stomach seemed to be tied in a knot. On the train he found himself seated by an elderly gentleman.

The older man noted the nervousness of the young man seated beside him and finally struck up a conversation with him. Before long he had heard the whole story. The young man ended with, "I don't know if they'll ever want me back again after the way I have treated them. I can hardly stand to find out the answer."

As the train rounded a bend in the tracks, the young man suddenly stiffened. "Please sir," he said. "My home is just around the next bend. It's right by the tracks. I wrote to my folks and told them I'd be riding by today, and that if they wanted me back to put something white in the yard. If they didn't, I would know that I should just ride on by and never trouble them again. I just can't bear to look. Please sir, would you look for me?" The man readily agreed.

Suddenly his excited voice broke into the rhythmical clicking of the tracks. "Look! boy, look!" he nearly yelled.

The boy lifted his head. Tears sprang to his eyes and rolled down his cheeks. Every white thing in the house must have been out in that yard. The clothesline, the bushes, the trees were draped with white sheets. Snow could have done little more!

Those two parents would not have let anything stop them from showing their long lost son the sign of allegiance and love he had requested. Never did they question what the neighbors would think. It didn't matter if people thought they had lost their minds. What a reunion that must have been!

Those parents had to decide whether or not to utilize their son's choice of what the sign would be. At any other time, white sheets in the yard would have been of no value, but because he had requested it, it was meaningful. The message the son had given essentially was, "If you love me, hang out a white sheet."

I remember a sign of allegiance we used in P.E. class when I was a girl in Jr. High. We had a small school and did not have established basketball teams. Each time we played, new teams were chosen. All of us were dressed alike, wearing our plain blue P.E. uniforms. When we got out onto the court to play, confusion reigned at first because no one knew who was on which team. We had difficulty remembering if the friend running toward you was for you or against you. Without some kind of distinction, teammates might even end up playing against themselves! One day our teacher brought some red "pinnies" and had my team put them on before the game. After that it was easy to tell who was for you and who was against you. Those red pinnies became a sign telling which team had our loyalties. The red pinnies we wore for the basketball team were arbitrarily chosen. On any other occasion, they would have been quite meaningless. But on the basketball court, it represented whose side you were on. Anyone who wanted to be on our team had to be willing to wear our team colors.

The Christian life is something like our basketball team. It isn't always easy to tell whose side we are on! The Bible says that Satan and his teammates will disguise themselves so that they look like they are on God's side. (2 Cor. 11:13-15) In fact, so deceptive is Satan that many of His followers don't even know they are following him. They think they are on God's side. (Matt. 7:21-23) That is why God has done

something like our basketball coach did. He has given us a sign by which we might know which side of the team we are on.

The sign of our allegiance to God goes far deeper than a display of emotions, or saying a few words that anyone could repeat, or wearing a lapel pin. God says more than, "If you love Me, honk your horn."

## **A STORY ABOUT OBEDIENCE**

The story is told in various forms about a man who had bought a lovely farm for his son and told him, "I will give you some instructions on how to plant the crops on this farm and I will come back in a few months and if you have followed my instructions, I will deed the farm to you to be yours."

The son readily agreed and the father delivered to him a list of instructions. The days went by and the son was following the list to the 'T' in every directive. He could see the wisdom of his father in what he had planned, but one day as he was preparing to plant one of the fields, he saw that his father wanted a crop there that the son felt was just not suitable. "It will never grow properly in this particular field", he reasoned, "Dad must have made a mistake—I know what crop is best to be put here so I will plant that."

The day appointed came and as the father came to inspect the farm, his son assured him that he had followed his every directive. The father systematically went around the property checking the various fields against the list he had given to the son. All went well until he came to the last field and saw there a crop that he had not ordered.

"What's this all about?" he asked the son.

"Oh Dad", replied his boy, "All the orders you gave me were just great Dad, except for this one, the crop you had said to plant just was no good for this field, but I obeyed you in all the rest."

"No, son", said the father sadly, "You didn't obey 'me' at all, your own logic accepted to do what I had said, but here you showed clearly who you were really following, it was your own will all along."

It was a quiet pair that finished the tour of the farm. The son had little to say. His father's words had made a deep impression. The well was indeed a sign of whether or not he loved and trusted his father enough to follow his requests even if he didn't fully understand or agree with them. He had not set out with the intention proving his lack of loyalty to his father, but his decision had revealed the hidden motives in his heart. His actions had shown what his motives had been even though the son himself had not even understood his own heart.

God also makes it clear to us that our actions display the hidden motives of our hearts, even when we don't understand them ourselves. Many times the Holy Scriptures remind us that a tree is known by its fruits. A good pear tree at the right time will be covered with pears. The pears reveal what kind of tree it is. So the fruits of our lives reveal where our loyalties really are and whether or not we are abiding in Jesus.

The Bible tells the story of a battle Israel was involved in. After the war a most unusual sign was used to determine who was friend or foe.

The Ammonites had declared war on Israel. They were determined to get control of some land they were accusing Israel of having taken from them. Israel began looking for a leader, and finally decided to make a man named Jephthah captain over their armies.

As Jephthah took control of the situation he first tried negotiating with the Ammonites. He reminded the king of the history of how the land was actually obtained in the first place. When it was apparent

## Lesson 16: Sunday in the New Testament

that the Ammonites were going to fight anyway, Jephthah recruited all the help that he could. With a prayer in his heart and making a solemn vow to God, he led his army to battle.

When the war was finished, Jephthah had won a resounding victory. Jephthah was then made a judge over Israel.

A strange thing happened after the war however. Things were just beginning to settle back to normal when a messenger from the tribe of Ephraim, one of the tribes of Israel, gave Jephthah a terrible message.

"Why didn't you call us to help you fight the Ammonites?" they challenged. "Since you didn't, we're going to burn your house down on top of you." This was no idle threat. The men of Ephraim were irate. They had banded together to attack the city of Gilead, where Jephthah lived. It is very likely that they were jealous because they had not been able to enrich themselves with the spoil from the battle with the Ammonites.

Jephthah responded immediately defending his actions and setting the record straight. He reminded them that he had called them to come and help him fight the Ammonites at a time when he needed them desperately. They had flatly refused to help! "Since you didn't come," he continued, "I had no choice but to take my life in my hands. We had to go and fight the Ammonites with a much smaller army than we needed, but the Lord was with us. What grounds do you have for fighting against me?" he questioned. He probably would have felt justified in attacking the Ephraimites because of their refusal to help in a time of need.

The Ephraimites were unimpressed. They were prepared for war. Jephthah quickly marshaled his men, the Gileadites, to defend themselves against the Ephraimites. Again Jephthah was victorious. The Ephraimites fled for their lives.

When the Ephraimites fled, the Gileadites strategically placed themselves at the river crossings where the Ephraimites would have to cross to get back to their homes. Before allowing any man to cross the river they would ask. "Are you an Ephraimite?"

Naturally, no Ephraimite would want to answer "yes" for fear of losing their lives, so even if the answer was "no" the Gileadites had one more question that had to be answered before anyone was allowed to cross the river.

It was a very simple question, but the answer would invariably reveal the true identity of the person being questioned. The man would be asked to repeat the word "Shibboleth", a word meaning "river". The Ephraimites had a little quirk in their speech which was either a difference in dialect, or a minor speech impediment like a lisp that they had inherited. They could not pronounce the sound "sh". Instead of saying "Shibboleth", an Ephraimite would always say "Sibboleth". By this ingenious but simple test, any Ephraimite crossing the river would be identified. The test worked. The Ephraimites were not allowed to escape.

If you think about the sign that the Gileadites were looking for, it is a very unusual and significant one. The Ephraimites were not destroyed because they said "Sibboleth". The problem was not that they had a lisp. The word "Sibboleth" only revealed who they were. They were destroyed because of who they were. They were destroyed because of what they had done.

A sign of allegiance to God is not something we do in order to win His favor. It is not something to earn salvation. It is something that reveals who we are. It is something that reveals whether or not we have been born again. It reveals whether or not we are willing to follow Him. It is something that reveals

## Lesson 16: Sunday in the New Testament

whether or not we are abiding in Him just as fruit reveals whether or not a branch is abiding in the vine.  
(See John 15)

Our lesson today helps us to find what God looks for as the sign of allegiance and love to Him. Study this lesson prayerfully, asking God to help you to reveal this sign of allegiance in your life.

### **I Love You Mother**

"I love you mother," said little John  
Then forgetting his work, his cap went on.  
And he was off to the garden swing,  
Leaving his mother the wood to bring.

"I love you mother," said Rosy Nell;  
I love you better than tongue can tell.  
Then she teased and pouted half the day,  
Till all were glad when she went to play.

"I love you mother," said little Fran;  
"Today I will help you all I can.  
How glad I am that school does not keep."  
And she rocked the baby till it fell asleep.

Then stepping softly, she brought the broom,  
And swept the floor and tidied the room.  
Busy and happy all the day was she,  
Helpful and cheerful as a child could be.

"I love you mother," again they said,  
Three little children as they went to bed.  
How do you think that mother guessed  
Which of them really loved her best?