

WHAT IS A COUNCIL

References:

Notes For Servants:

- 1.
- 2.

Objectives:

General:

Specific:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Instructions:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Bible Verse:

**“And put no difference between us and them,
purifying their hearts by faith.”**

(Acts 15:9)

Lesson:

WHAT IS A COUNCIL

THE SPIRIT OF UNITY

The Early Church, in the first centuries, spread all-over the world. The Holy Spirit led the Apostles, the Disciples and the Bishops of the Church in understanding and interpreting the Christian faith. They always prayed for guidance from the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit guided their thinking and preserved their unity. From time to time, some persons who depended on their own minds and knowledge, started teaching in a different way than what the Church has received in the Scripture and from our Lord Himself.

But the Church was always careful to preserve the Spirit of unity among the Christians all over the world, and protect; Christian faith from any misunderstanding or wrong interpretation. When any controversy was raised, the leaders of the Church assembled together to examine the different views and declare the Orthodox faith of the Church. The bishops of the Church came from different parts of the world and met together in the form of an ecumenical council.

THE FIRST COUNCIL

The first council in the life of the Christian Church was assembled in Jerusalem at the time of the Apostles of our Lord. We can read about the Council in the Book of Acts, Chapter 15.

After the Ascension of our Lord to heaven, His Disciples and Apostles received the Holy Spirit, and started preaching and teaching of the salvation of Christ to the world. Paul and Barnabas, two of the Apostles, preached among the Gentiles (the non-Jewish people) in different parts of the world. When they finished their mission, they travelled by boat to Antioch, and met with the Disciples and the Church there, and told them about all that God had done with them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

THE CONTROVERSY

While they were in Antioch, some of the Jews who became Christians, insisted that the Gentiles cannot be saved unless they first follow the law of Moses before becoming Christians. Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them. They had long arguments and debate together.

The Church of Antioch appointed the Apostles Paul and Barnabas and some other members of the Church of Antioch to go to Jerusalem. When they reached there, they told the Disciples of the dispute that happened in Antioch and asked their guidance.

THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM

The Apostles, the Disciples and the bishops of the Church were assembled together in Jerusalem to consider the matter. Paul and Barnabas told them how the Christian Jews of Judea insisted that the Gentiles must first follow Jewish tradition before becoming Christians. The members of the Council prayed for guidance from the Holy Spirit. They knew that they cannot decide on matters of faith by their own individual minds, but only through the action of the Holy Spirit in them as they come together with the spirit of Unity and love in the Council.

The members of the Council had long discussion about the matter. Then St. Peter rose and said that God has given the Holy Spirit to all those who believe in Him in the whole world, and purified their hearts by faith. He said, "We believe that all men, Gentiles and Jews, shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now therefore, why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the Disciples which neither our Fathers nor we have been able to bear?"

St. James, one of the twelve Disciples and the Head of the Council, told them that what they had heard from Peter, Paul and Barnabas agreed with the words of the prophets of the Old Testament. Then he offered the following proposal:

"We should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from pollution of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood" (Acts 15:19-20).

All the members of the Council agreed on the proposal of St. James, and wrote a message to the Churches informing them of the Council's decision.

THE SPIRIT OF UNITY IN THE CHURCH

The Council of Jerusalem was a model for the life of the Church, through the centuries. The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, continued to build up clear understanding on Christian faith. Individual and heretic interpretations were examined and refuted by ecumenical Councils. The Councils offer testimony to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Although many ideas were expressed in seeking the truth, but they denied their individual views and accepted the Orthodox understanding of Christian faith.

Conclusion:

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- 2.