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Sunday School Lesson

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON
PAUL ADMONISHES THE CHURCH

by Rev. E. O. Todd

LESSON: 1 Cor. 6:10; 11: 17-27; Rom. 13: 12-14; Eph. 6:18-21

Considering their pagan background, it is not surprising that there were occasions when Paul felt called upon to admonish his Gentile converts to Christianity. Greek religion tended to encourage sensual orgies as an expression of religious zeal; sexual promiscuity accompanied the worship of the various goddesses of fertility, of which Diana of the Ephesians who figured in last week's lesson was one. Religion thus based upon nature worship, tended to encourage the gratification of the physical appetites, with no restraint from any sense of a higher moral authority than that gratification itself. The God of the Hebrews, who reveals himself in acts of righteousness, was not known to this pagan nature worship, indeed was utterly foreign to it; and it appeared to this type of pagan that the purpose of life was not to reflect God's righteousness, but to indulge the desires of the body.

A failure to realize the demands of this higher righteousness soon manifested itself in the moral life of the Gentile Churches. And repeatedly Paul had to admonish them and bring them to such a realization.

It seems evident that in the early Church (at least in Corinth) the Lord's Supper was conducted as a congregational meal, in connection with which there was a commemoration of the last supper Jesus had with his disciples. It was not part of a formal service of worship as in our day. In the passage from 1 Cor. Paul con-

demns abuses which mar the conduct of this social meal. Evidently everyone ate his own food, and everyone ate his own food. (It was not a pot-luck meal.) The extreme wealth and extreme poverty, which in a preceding lesson, we saw existing side by side in Corinth, manifested itself in the Church, with the result that the rich made gluttons of themselves, while the poorer members went without. It is not at all certain that the word "drunken" in v. 21 refers to intoxication; Paul may mean that the rich drank while the poor were unable to do so. But in view of the general moral conditions in Corinth, it is quite probable that actual drunkenness was one of the vices or abuses which attended this meal.

In this lesson, Paul is concerned to point out that this social feasting is NOT the Lord's Supper. It is something entirely different. (v.20). And then he goes on to give an account of the Lord's Supper as it was instituted by Christ, contrasting its significance with the type of thing that went on in the Corinthian Church. By confronting the Corinthian Church with the true significance of the feast they take so lightly, he hopes to shame them into repentance. He contrasts the manner of life of the Corinthian Church with the love and sacrifice and seriousness of the Lord's death. He contrasts the sordid with the sublime; human viciousness with divine grace.

In the other lesson passages, Paul attacks the same problem from another angle, calling upon his readers in the Roman and Ephesian Churches not to be swallowed up in the darkness of the corrupt pagan world. They must purify themselves, and as befits Christians, put on the righteousness of God (i.e., Jesus Christ). The vices of the pagan world — wantonness, strife, enviousness, sensuality, drunkenness — must be excluded from Christian conduct. Why seek joy in wine when true joy can be found only in the Holy Spirit? Why sing the licentious songs or drinking bouts when there are songs to sing in praise of God's goodness? (Eph. 5: 18, 19).

It should be noted, however, that Paul makes no mere prohibition. Rather does he summon the people to a new faithfulness to their Christian destiny. He does not forbid; he challenges. He challenges positively, not negatively — not just to abstain from certain vices, but to go beyond them, to leave them behind as they press "toward the goal."

Whether or not the prevalence of drinking and sexual immorality in our

time are the positive result of a new nature-worship, it is obvious that we are living in an age where there is no consciousness of the demands of God's transcendent righteousness and holiness. Man has become a law unto himself and defines what's right according as it pleases him or suits his convenience. In the face of the resulting immorality in the world, and even in the Church, the world must be confronted by the awful sacrifice of Christ made to satisfy the demands of God's righteousness. Over against the looseness of modern living stands the purity of the Lamb of God "without spot and without blemish." A world which has witnessed the crucifixion of the Son of God, cannot afford to be anything but sober about the moral questions which face it today, for that crucifixion represents the worst that sin is capable of doing, as well as the judgment of God upon sin. The Church at least cannot be absolved of seriousness about these moral questions. Christ most certainly did not die upon the Cross to create a so-called Christian Society which should sanction tandem marriages, laugh tolerantly at drunkenness, talk in a sophisticated manner about the convenience of cocktail lounges, and applaud governments, which cynically promote the liquor traffic at the same time as they try to promote public health, and root out the "Reds", who would destroy our Christian (?) way of life.

A new puritanism, however, is not going to solve the moral problems of our day. As we have seen in this lesson, the preaching of the law against sin was not Paul's method. Rather did he preach deliverance from sin. And the responsibility of the modern Church is not to lift up its hands in holy horror at the sins of the world, or the sins of some of its own members; its responsibility is to hold up to view the Crucified Lamb of God who opened up a living way into the holiest of all — a way into life where men may walk in the light and not stumble. The constructive work of the Church is to speak of what is in Christ. So long as she is only half-serious about her faith and her teaching, her spiritual life will not be sufficiently exalting as to be an adequate substitute for the intoxication of the flesh.

Let individual Christians beware of that self-righteousness which comes from merely "taking a stand" on this or that moral question, (and I do not mean they should not take a stand) and realize that the only effective means of combatting immorality is by the fidelity of their witness to their faith as a whole. On the other hand, the Church and her members must not side-step their responsibility as spiritual agents, on these grounds, (sticking to the gospel and keeping out of politics) by not demanding Governments accept their responsibility of preserving public order, and of having respect for the righteousness of God. It is always the duty of the Church to require of governments that they carry out their appointed task of wielding the sword of authority for the public welfare. What we are saying, however, is that the Church does not effectively combat vice by demanding Parliamentary legislation and Government action. The only effectual means of combatting vice and promoting virtue is the preaching and the hearing of the Gospel.

"WORK NIGHT" FOR ST. GEORGE'S CLUB

The meeting of St. George's Club on Tuesday, November 28th, took the form of a work night when members pitched in to clean up the clubhouse at the rear of the church. During alterations to the church basement, much of the Sunday School equipment had been moved into the club-rooms and this was rearranged, as well as a good clean-up of the kitchen.

The club decided to make repairs to the roof of the building and to purchase a new piano for the Sunday School, the old one to be used in the club rooms. Plans were also talked over to hold a series of card parties and the subject of a dance was brought up, but no decision was reached on the latter, because of the difficulty of securing a suitable date for it. Light refreshments were served by the committee for the evening, George Walker and Mrs. William McNally. At the next meeting, officers will be elected for 1947.

**REV. ARTHUR DAYFOOT
ENGAGED TO CANADIAN
NURSE IN CHINA**

His friends in town will be interested to learn of the engagement of the Rev. Arthur Dayfoot, United Church missionary in Loshan, Szechwan, China, and Miss Essie Julien, a Canadian nurse in the same mission field. The news was contained in a letter received recently from Mr. Dayfoot by his friend, Jack MacLaren.

Miss Julien, a native of Whistler, Ontario, is a graduate of the nursing course at the University of Western Ontario and worked for two years with the Victorian Order of Nurses in York Township before going to China. Mr. Dayfoot, a graduate of Georgetown High School and the University of Toronto, is the son of Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Dayfoot, long Georgetown residents, who now live in Oak Bay, B. C.

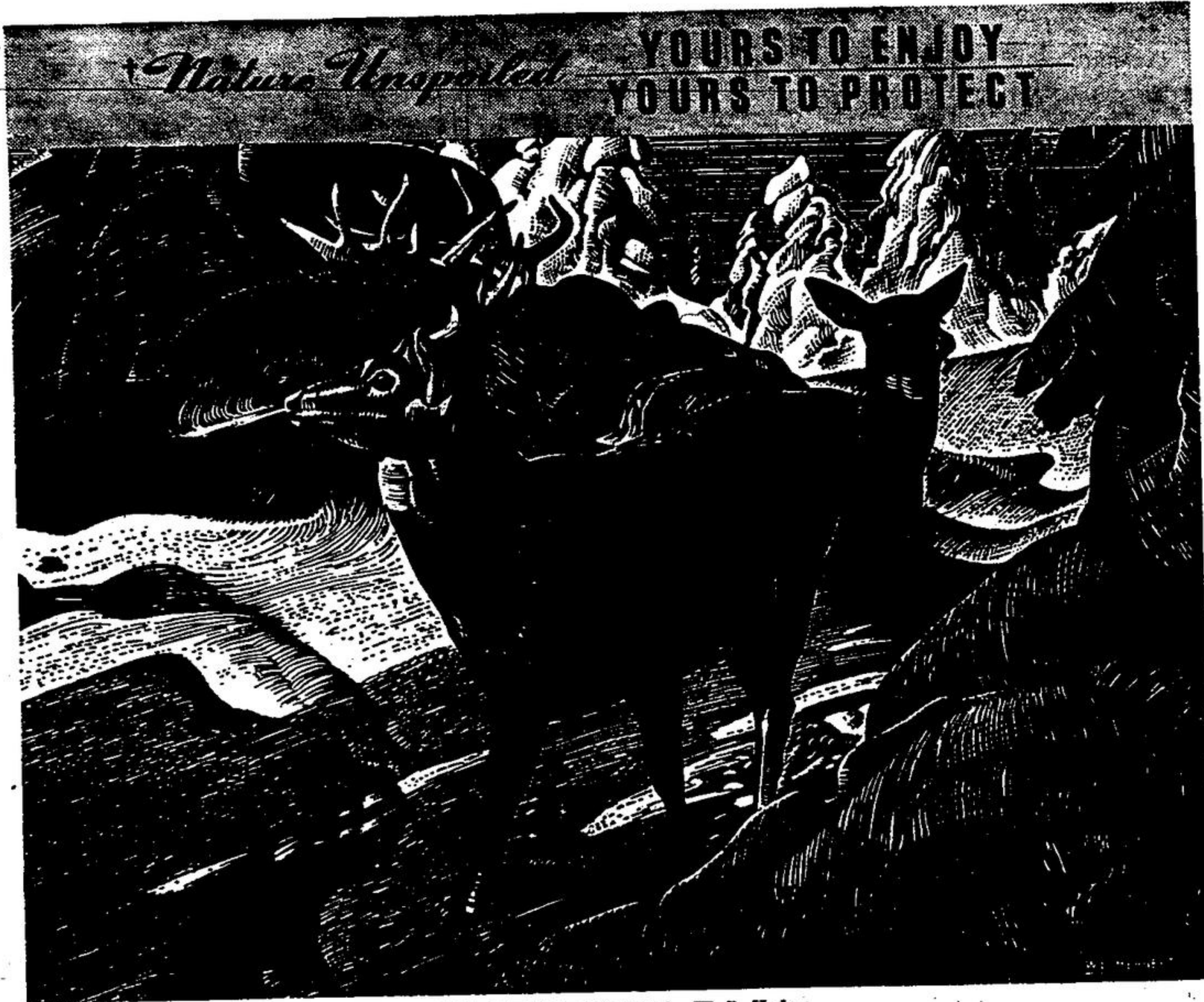
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