

THE WELCOMING COMMITTEE / Sunday, October 25, 2015

Unifying Topic: TRUSTING THE SPIRIT

I. A Controversy Arises (Acts 11:1-3)

II. Peter Defends His Decision (Acts 11:4-10)

III. A Controversy Is Temporarily Settled (Acts 11:11-18)

The Main Thought: Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? (Acts 11:17, KJV).

Unifying Principle: When someone's actions are contrary to community norms, he or she will be required to report the results of his or her work. How can they justify what they have done? Peter's report of how the Holy Spirit had converted the Gentiles gave rise to the Jerusalem church's endorsement of his actions.

Lesson Aim: To examine the controversy caused by Peter's visit to Cornelius and understand what led to its resolution.

Life Aim: To be aware that taking unusual actions should be done only when one is convinced it is the will of God.

HISTORY:

Acts 10:34-48 God makes it clear through Peter's teaching that the Good News of Christ is for everyone. God is not a respecter of persons; He shows no partiality. But every nation that fears Him and works righteousness is acceptable to Him (**vv. 34-35**). This is the same message that God gave to the people of Israel, when he sent Jesus Christ, into this world to offer peace to them (he is Lord of all) (**v. 36**). Peter lets them know that even they know for themselves the Word which had been spoken throughout all Judea, beginning with John the Baptist in Galilee after proclaiming how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. After that, Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him (**vv.37-38**). Peter, and the rest of the apostles, were witnesses, even eyewitnesses of all that Jesus did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him up on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses; who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead (**vv.39-41**). And Jesus commanded them to preach to the people and to testify that he is the One appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. And to Jesus all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through Jesus' name (**vv.42-43**). And while Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the Word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. They were even hearing them speak in tongues and extolling God (**vv44-46**). Peter declared, "*Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?*" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. The people then asked Peter to remain longer (days) (**vv.47-48**).

LESSON:

Acts 11:1-3 A Controversy Arises

11:1 And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. The church's early vision was narrow and traditional, which caused controversy to arise when someone over-steps boundaries. That controversial door has been opened. God has allowed the Gentiles to receive Salvation by sending Peter to speak the Word to them. The apostles and brethren had heard about Peter's preaching mission to the Gentiles and about them receiving the Word of God (even the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues). The news was bound to travel fast, for it was unheard of that a Jew would fellowship and eat with an idolatrous Gentile. And on top of that, Peter had baptized the Gentiles without first requiring them to be circumcised.

11:2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,--

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Therefore, when Peter came into Jerusalem, he was confronted by the apostles and brethren who were of the circumcision. They contended with him, meaning to stand against; to take an opposite position; to take sides against; to oppose. Remember, most, if not all the believers at Jerusalem were Jews. They were circumcised as small children and had been committed to the Law of Moses since childhood. In their minds Christ had only added new teachings to their existing law and religion. Therefore, if a person wished to accept Christ, he had to become a Jew first: be circumcised • commit himself to the Law of Moses • and observe the ceremonies and rituals of Judaism. Then, and only then could he receive Christ and be baptized. Then, and only then could he be accepted into the church. Some hang onto their religious form, ceremony, rituals, and regulations. These are placed before the lives and salvation of men.

- This creates legalism.
- This creates prejudice, discrimination, and blinds us to God's purpose to reach out to all men in salvation.

The church's mission is to reach both the dirty and the clean; the lower and the upper; the lesbian and the homosexual. The disciple is called to do the Lord's Will to reach and evangelize the world and if necessary at times to break tradition of the way they've always done it. When you do that, you can expect criticism and contention from legalist and traditionalist. Nevertheless, the true disciple of Christ remains faithful even as Peter did. He did what God commanded to reach out and share Christ with a word filled for desperate needs. Do we share or do we bottle the gospel up and keep it to ourselves; do we monopolize it where no one else knows about Christ?—never reaching out or sharing Christ—staying in the four walls of the church building?

11:3 Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. They looked at it as if Peter had over-stepped his bounds. First, he went unto uncircumcised men, and second, he ate with them. Peter had gone contrary to the beliefs of the Law of Moses and their legalistic, traditional, and monopolized religion. They failed to grasp:

- That Christ was the fulfillment of the law.
- That Christ had kept the law perfectly, thereby becoming the Ideal Man, the Perfect Pattern of what every man should be.
- That Christ was not only the embodiment of the law, but so much more—the very embodiment of God Himself.
- That Christ as the Son of God, and as the Ideal Man is the One to whom all men are now to look and obey.

This was the great battle: some Jews never broke away from legalistic religion which built barriers and walls for others to cross, causing separatism and division. All through the history of the church, extending from the early church up to the present time, there have been some who have refused to follow Christ alone.

Acts 11:4-10 Peter Defends His Decision

11:4 But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,— Peter had to give an answer; he had to defend himself in his decision. It had to be clearly explained and understood in sequence to those contending with him. He merely prepared and planned out from the beginning, and explained it step by step of what had occurred.

11:5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:—¹We can say that Peter had a three-part defense, as he presented three pieces of evidence:

1. The vision from God (verses 5-11).

Peter's first defense is to be straight-forward. In no way did Peter shrink in giving complete details of what had

¹ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/peters-defense-to-the-legalists/>
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occurred. First, while praying to God in Joppa he fell into a trance and saw a vision of a certain vessel descending like a great sheet let down from heaven by its four corners coming to him.

11:6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. Looking at the sheet he fastened his eyes on this unbelievable object and its content. He saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

11:7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. Peter then heard and was shaken by a voice that said "*Arise Peter, slay and eat.*" God is telling Peter to slay and eat any of these four-footed animals, etc.

11:8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But, Peter says "*Not so Lord*"; making sure that they understood that it was God who is speaking to him. For nothing common or unclean; unholy or impure has at any time entered into his mouth.

11:9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. Well, the voice from heaven comes back again to answer Peter: "*What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*" "*Don't say it isn't right when God declare it is.*"

11:10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. Evidently Peter was hard to convince because this was done three times. The sheet with all the creatures upon it, by the same hands that let it down, drew it back up; disappeared up into heaven.

Acts 11:11-18 A Controversy Is Temporarily Settled

11:11 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. This is where God works out all things well, for at the same time, immediately there were three men already at his house sent from Caesarea for him.

11:12 And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me,— and we entered into the man's house:— Second defense:

2. The witness of the Spirit (verses 12-15, 17).

It was the Holy Spirit who told Peter to go with them; follow these Gentiles, doubting nothing; without hesitation; and to make no distinction or difference. Peter had witnesses to back him up. They would substantiate his account of this. These six brethren accompanied him to the man's (Cornelius') house, who also had been praying, and had been prepared by his own vision from the Lord to receive Peter. They were there to vouch and verify the event.

11:13 And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;— Cornelius was in Caesarea also having a vision, of an angel standing in his house, telling him to send men to Joppa for Simon, whose surname is Peter.

11:14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. Peter would be the one to tell Cornelius and his household words of salvation. Everything that happened to Peter in opening the door to the Gentiles was of God, initiated and controlled by God. Peter was merely the instrument God used. It was God's Will; God's work, God's activity, and God's carrying the gospel to the world (Gentiles) not Peter's. But, the importance of Peter preaching the Word to Cornelius and his house can never be overstressed.

11:15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. As soon as Peter began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on Cornelius and his house as it did on Peter and the 120 disciples at the

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beginning in the Upper Room.

11:16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Third defense:

3. The witness of the Word (v.16)

As according to the Word of God, Peter remembered the testimony of John. "*John indeed baptized with water but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost*" (John 1:26, 33).

11:17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?— Finally, Peter was convinced of another truth: he could not withstand (stand against) God. Peter had nothing to do with giving the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles. The gift of the Holy Spirit is God's doing, just as to the 120 in the Upper Room who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. And one thing for sure, no man is going to stop God from doing what He purposes to do.

11:18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. And in conclusion, no one was ready to debate this issue; no rebuttal after hearing all Peter had to say. In the minds of the Jewish Christians, the evangelization of Gentiles would mean a drastic reappraisal of their own position before God. They would have to first question the direct leading of God the Father, provision of salvation by God the Son, and the confirming signs of God the Spirit. Absolutely, no one was ready to do that, so they held their peace, and began to glorify God saying, "*Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*" They were convicted and agreed that God grants repentance to all men. The door that was cracked by Peter was crashed by Paul. Three things in reference to repentance:

1. Repentance is the gift of God and of the Holy Spirit.
2. Repentance is unto life, that is, leads to life.
3. God has thrown open the door of salvation to the world (Gentiles).

This was a turning point for the early church. They had to accept those who God had chosen, even the Gentiles.

SUMMARY:

²Peter wisely had taken some Hebrew Christians with him when he went to Cornelius' house, because it was not long before he was to be confronted for ministering to Gentiles (**vv.1-3**). When he returned to Jerusalem he was met by members of the strong legalistic party in the church of Judea, and was rebuked by them for fellowshiping and eating with them.

Peter had nothing to fear as he faced these Jewish Christians, because he had only followed orders from the Lord. He simply told the whole story from beginning to end (**vv.4-10**).

Peter tells how three men were standing at his house in Judea from Caesarea (**v.11**) and the Spirit told him to go with them. He presented six witnesses to verify the fact (**v.12**). Cornelius, at the same time in Caesarea is having a vision, of an angel standing in his house, telling him to send men to Joppa for Simon, whose surname is Peter who would tell him words that would save him and his household. And when Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit fell on them and then Peter baptized them with water (**vv.13-16**). Since God had given them (the Gentiles) the equal gift as those (Jews) who have already believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, he could not stand against God. When the legalistic party heard this, they became silent and glorified God saying that God had also granted repentance unto the Gentiles (**vv.17-18**).

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