

Sunday, October 19, 2025 | Martyrs

Week 10 | Acts 11:1-18 | “The Gospel Goes to the Gentiles, Pt. 3”

READ: Acts 11:1-18 (ESV)

¹ Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ³ “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” ⁴ But Peter began and explained it to them in order: ⁵ “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. ⁶ Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. ⁷ And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ ⁸ But I said, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹ But the voice answered a second time from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’ ¹⁰ This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹ And behold, at that very moment, three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’ ¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?” ¹⁸ When they heard these things, they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

I want you to notice three things:

i. 10:1-23a – A Gentile gets a heavenly vision.

So, what's the takeaway?

The Gospel views **all people** as **invited guests**.

ii. 10:23b-48 – The Gentiles hear the Gospel.

So, what's the takeaway?

Faith in Christ brings the **full filling** of the Holy Spirit **for all**.

iii. **11:1-18 – The Gentiles welcomed by Jewish believers.**

Vs. 1 – As it was when the Samaritans were evangelized (cf. 8:14), the evangelization of the Gentiles was big news for the early Church. The rest of “the apostles” and the other Christian sisters and “brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.” Even then, though the Church was spread out, believers remained connected to each other. **Distance cannot diminish the bond between those who are united in Christ.** This is not unlike how missionaries will send letters to supporting churches.

Interestingly, Luke doesn't say, "receive the Holy Spirit," but "received the word of God." To hear the Gospel, repent, receive the Holy Spirit, and get baptized means, broadly speaking, to receive "the word of God." In other words, if you haven't heard the Gospel, repented, received the Holy Spirit, and then been baptized, you haven't truly "received the word of God." You cannot say you obey the Scriptures if you don't have the marks of obedience.

Vs. 2-3 – When Peter returned to 'Jerusalem,' he was met by a group of Jewish Christians. Luke calls them 'the circumcision party.'¹ This term refers to a subgroup within the Christian brotherhood who, as Jewish Christians, insisted that the Jewish traditions, namely those regarding food and circumcision, continue. This group's stance on these traditions would become a significant issue in the early Church.¹ But that such a subdivision within the Church exists at this time suggests that the practice of circumcision had already become a topic of debate. Otherwise, why would there be a need for a group to be identified in this way? You see, while Paul will make the matter explicit, Jesus' own teaching lays the groundwork by which circumcision becomes outdated.

Contrary to popular belief at the time, Jesus demonstrated that circumcision was not part of the *Mosaic* covenant; it was part of the *Abrahamic* covenant (cf. Jn. 7:22-23). As such, though prescribed by the law, circumcision wasn't just a *product of the law*; it was first and foremost a *product of faith*, namely, Abraham's faith (cf. Ac. 7:8; Rom. 4:9-12). Strictly speaking, circumcision never made a person Jewish; it had always been the sign of a believer. Combine this with the fact that Jesus came to fulfill all the requirements of the law (cf. Matt. 5:17-20), even at this early stage in the life of the Church, it could've been argued that, under the NT covenant faith of Jesus Christ, circumcision was no longer necessary to follow God as it had been under the OT covenant. Abraham believed and was given circumcision as the seal of his

¹ Vickers, Brian J., "Acts," *ESV Expository Commentary*, Vol. IX, John-Acts (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 440.

righteousness (cf. Rom. 4:11). Now, Christians believe they're given the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 1:13). In light of Christ, there is no need for circumcision anymore.

And indeed, this is how circumcision is handled throughout the rest of the NT. This does not mean being circumcised is wrong, nor that the practice *must* be done away with entirely. Restraining one's liberty is sometimes necessary to reach the lost, even if it means being circumcised (cf. Ac. 16:3). But, nevertheless, even in such fringe cases, circumcision is merely a formality and no longer holds the place of honor it once held. Circumcision has always been, first and foremost, a matter of the heart (cf. Rom. 2:25-29), such that, through faith in Jesus Christ, one can be circumcised of heart and not of flesh and still be accounted a descendant of Abraham, and, as such, a child of God (cf. Eph. 2:11-13).

But this idea was slow to catch on. In fact, some of Paul's biggest opponents were those who became known as "Judaizers" (cf. Ac. 15:1-29). Sadly, even Peter and Barnabas were duped by the circumcision party (cf. Gal. 2:11-14). These were supposedly Jewish Christians who insisted that Gentiles first become Jewish proselytes in every sense of the world, namely, circumcision, before they were allowed to become Christians. Such teaching is the antithesis of the Gospel (cf. Gal. 6:11-16). To be clear, just because someone was of the circumcision party didn't mean they were also a Judaizer, but such individuals were rare (cf. Col. 4:10-11).² So, while there were exceptions, *by and large*, to be a part of the "circumcision party" was to be a part of a group that was "insubordinate" to God (Tit. 1:10).

Peter was "criticized" by those of the circumcision party, **who said, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."** Peter's association with Gentiles and, *even more scandalous*, his table fellowship with non-Jews was highly offensive to these Judaizers. Remember, it was already known throughout the Church that it was because Peter "went to uncircumcised men and ate with them" that "the Gentiles also had received the word of God" (vs. 1). This criticism didn't factor in every detail. **The circumcision party only wanted to focus on things they perceived as wrong.** The Pharisees did the same thing. Though Jesus mostly steered clear of Gentiles, he did eat with many Jewish "tax collectors and sinners," and this practice greatly displeased the religious leaders (cf. Lu. 15:2). Legalism, whereby man adds onto God's commands, is as much a problem for Christianity as it was for Judaism (e.g., Halloween).

Vs. 4-15 – To defend himself, Peter relays events "in order," or, as they happened. He speaks about how, in "a vision," he saw "a great sheet descending," upon which were "animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air." He talks about how he was told, from

² Even James, the brother of Jesus, was a part of the circumcision party (cf. Gal. 2:12).

heaven, “[Rise, Peter; kill and eat.](#)” Peter relays how he refused and how the voice from heaven said, “[What God has made clean, do not call common.](#)” And then comes the kicker: “[This happened *three* \[emphasis added\] times.](#)” The repetition ensured no detail was forgotten.

Peter then tells the Jews about how, “[at that very moment,](#)” Cornelius’s men arrived at the place where he was staying and about how “[the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction.](#)” In this, Peter was identifying himself with the circumcision party. He, too, needed to be explicitly commanded to go with these Gentile men; otherwise, he wouldn't have gone.

Peter says, “[These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.](#)” The way the apostle said this indicates these men were standing with Peter, testifying to everything he said.

Peter leaves out how Cornelius’s men stayed with Simon overnight, but he wasn’t hiding details. The “[six brothers](#)” could’ve filled in any gaps. Peter is given the highlights of this event without being exhaustive.

Peter then relays Cornelius's vision, about how an “[angel](#)” told the centurion to go to “[Joppa](#)” find “[Peter](#)” who “[will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.](#)” This is new information. Only now do we learn why Cornelius was so prepared for Peter’s arrival. He had all of his friends and family present because he wanted everyone he knew to be saved, including himself. This also shows that Cornelius wasn’t saved through the vision but only after hearing the gospel message from Peter.³ Though God can use miraculous means of communication, they are all secondary to the Scriptures. Only by that which was demonstrated by Jesus during his life, witnessed and verified by the apostles, and then written down for our edification, can someone be saved. *Sola Scriptura!*

Then Peter said, “[As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning.](#)” Perhaps, as in Acts 2, Peter saw “[Divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance](#)” (Ac. 2:3-4). And, as we talked about then, the “[tongues](#)” of Ac. 2 were other languages and not incoherent utterances, and such is the case with the “[tongues](#)” of Ac. 10.

Admittedly, that “[tongues](#)” means intelligible languages isn’t explicit in the text. My Charismatic brothers and sisters would point out that, considering that these Gentiles were all from the same region, there would've been no need for them to speak in foreign languages. This is a good point. But if it were incoherent speech, how did Peter

³ Vickers (2019), 441.

and the rest of the Jewish Christians understand that they were “[extolling God](#)” (10:46)? Were interpreters present who explained what was being said (cf. 1 Cor. 14:27)? If so, the text makes no mention of them. The most straightforward reading of the text would be to interpret the Pentecost of the Gentiles through the lens of the Pentecost of the Jews. This means that “[tongues](#),” in both instances, likely refers to known languages and not ecstatic unintelligible utterances.

Vs. 16-17 – At this point, Peter gives insight into what he was thinking at this moment: “[And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’](#)” [This is a quote from Acts 1:5, shortly before the Day of Pentecost, when the Jews received the Holy Spirit. Now, here it is again, after the Gentiles have received the Holy Spirit.](#) The fact that this exact quote is key to understanding that both events—the Holy Spirit filling the Gentiles as he did the Jews on the Day of Pentecost—means the two events are parallel, sharing the same conclusion: Jews and Gentiles alike share in the same Spirit, and as such, share in the same promise of salvation. This is why Peter says, “[If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?](#)” [This moment didn’t come about through the machinations of Peter; it was the movement of the Holy Spirit. God was the catalyst behind this event.](#)

The Greek word translated as “[stand](#)” is *kōlyō*, and cross-referencing its usage in the NT gives us some interesting parallels. It was used in Ac. 8:36 where the Ethiopian Eunuch said, “[See, here is water! What prevents \[*kōlyō*\] me from being baptized?](#)” But the closest parallel is in Ac. 10:47. There, Peter uses the same Greek word and asks a similar question when he says, “[Can anyone withhold \[*kōlyō*\] water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?](#)” Just as Peter didn’t want to “[withhold water for baptizing these people](#),” he didn’t want to “[stand in God’s way](#).” These words are also reminiscent of Gamaliel’s words in Ac. 5:38–39, where he warned the Sanhedrin, “[Keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!](#)” If Peter refused to go to Cornelius or preach the Gospel or eat with them or not baptize them, it would’ve meant that he was “[opposing God!](#)” [Peter would’ve been no better than the Pharisees! He would’ve been no better than Jonah, who resisted going to Ninevah! To restrict the Gentiles from entering the Church would be to resist God!](#)

Interestingly, the disciples had stood in God’s way before. When the disciples were stopping children from coming to Jesus, the Lord said, “[Let the children come to me, and do not hinder \[*kōlyō*\] them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God](#)” (Lu. 18:16). After the disciple rebuked

someone for casting out demons, Jesus said, “Do not stop [*kōlyō*] him, for the one who is not against you is for you” (Lu. 9:50).

Vs. 18 – Luke says, “When they heard these things, they fell silent.” Though this would not be the last time the Jews would have issues with Gentiles in the Church (cf. Ac. 15), at least for now, they could not deny the clear evidence of God's handiwork. Any objections they might've had were silenced. Cornelius had a messenger from heaven tell him to find Peter. Peter had a vision, spoke with God himself, and was then guided by the Holy Spirit to meet with Cornelius. None could deny this meeting had been divinely orchestrated, and none could deny that what occurred had been the Lord's doing.

But far from this being something that displeased those of the circumcision party, Luke says, “They glorified God.” They will rejoice again after the Jerusalem council, too (cf. Ac. 15:22). Doubtless, there are those who, no matter how good the change may be, resist change. Paul will speak to those very people throughout the books of Philippians and Galatians. **But just because some would like to hold to their traditions doesn't mean they're completely resistant to change.** Though these Jewish Christians will remain culturally Jewish and will likely raise their children to be Jewish, they are willing to open the doors of the Church and their hearts to those who are utterly devoid of any outward show of Jewishness.

What they glorified God with was these words: “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.” Peter says something similar in Acts 5:31, “God exalted [Christ] at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (cf. Lu. 1:77). God is glorified and Christ is exalted when needy sinners, be they Jew or Gentile, repent, getting their sins forgiven, and thereby receiving eternal life.

So, what's the takeaway?

Faithfulness to the Great Commission means holding the **traditions** of man **loosely** and the **teachings** of God **firmly**.⁴

READ: Matthew 15:1-9 (ESV)

¹ Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ² “Why do your disciples **break the tradition** of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.” ³ He answered them, “And why do you **break the commandment of God** for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’

⁴ ChatGPT assisted in the specific wording of this. Initially, I wrote, “A church committed to the Great Commission will set aside any tradition that impedes the spread of the Gospel. “

and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' ⁵ But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," ⁶ he need not honor his father.' So, **for the sake of your tradition**, you have made **void** the word of God. ⁷ You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ⁸ "This people honors me with **their lips**, but **their heart** is far from me; ⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching **as doctrines** the commandments **of men**."

Christ has commanded us, "Go therefore and make disciples of **all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded **you**" (Matt. 28:19-20).

What barriers have we put up in our lives that has absolved us from following the explicit command of Jesus Christ to share the Gospel? For example:

(1) America First isn't wrong, but unchecked patriotism is idolatry, and it can keep us from reaching the nations.

(2) Preferring KJV isn't wrong, but insisting that other translations are corrupt--i.e., KJV-only-ism--is incorrect.

(3) Music preferences aren't wrong, but condemning forms of music based on style, rather than content, is bad.

(4) It is good to grow in one's spiritual maturity but if we lose our humility in the process, such that we can no longer abide be around those who are less mature in the faith, than we're not only enemies of younger believers but we've made ourselves the enemy of God (cf. Matt. 18:6).

To amend a famous quote from Thomas Campbell, "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent. Where the Scriptures whispers, we whisper; where the Scriptures shouts, we shout." We get ourselves in trouble when we get those things backwards. When the preferential and the traditional trumps the biblical, our faith and practices become unbiblical. **For more on this, read *Finding the Right Hills to Die On*, by Gavin Ortlund.**

Video Description:

Martyrs | Week 10 | Acts 11:1-18 | "The Gospel Goes to the Gentiles, Pt. 3"

Today, we wrap up this pivotal moment in church history. Peter has gone to the Gentiles and they've believed the Gospel and received the Holy Spirit. Now, the lead apostle must address some of the concerns of his fellow Jewish believers. Understandably, they're somewhat taken aback by what's transpired and need Peter to help them wrap their heads around what's going on. And though they will initially criticize Peter, by the end of the discussion, they will come around to his side. After all, none could deny the hand of God at work in the lives of Cornelius and his people. To do so would be to oppose God himself, and no one would want to do that.

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