

The Gospel for People Not Necessarily Like You

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[0:00] If you would take your Bibles and go to the book of Acts, chapter 11. If you're visiting with us, if you pull out that black Bible in a chair in front of you, underneath that chair, you can pull out that black Bible and go towards the back and then find page 101, 101.

You'll find Acts, chapter 11. Acts 11, we're going to study the first 18 verses of Acts 11. Acts 11. I'll read our passage and then we'll begin our study. Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them. But Peter began to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying.

In a trance I saw a vision, a certain object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky. And it came right down to me. And when I had fixed my gaze upon it and was observing it, I saw the four-footed animals of the earth, and the wild beasts, and the crawling creatures, and the birds of the air.

[1:35] And I also heard a voice saying to me, Arise, Peter, kill and eat. Verse 8. But I said, By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.

But a voice from heaven answered a second time, What God has cleansed no longer consider unholy. And this happened three times. Everything was drawn back up into the sky.

And behold, at that time three men appeared before the house in which we were, having been sent to me from Caesarea. And the Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. And these six brethren also went with me.

We entered the man's house. He reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here. And he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as upon us at the beginning. And I remember the word of the Lord, how he used to say, John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

[2:36] If God therefore gave to them the same gift as to us also, after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way? And when they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance unto life.

Fastcompany.com had an article titled, Five Reasons You Should Hang Out With People Who Are Different From You.

The article begins like this, We all seem to gravitate toward our comfort zones from time to time, and one of the easiest ways to stay there is to spend time with people who are just like us.

So here's the five reasons you should hang out with people who are different from you, according to fastcompany.com. Number one, it increases your self-awareness and acceptance of others.

Number two, it will help you think critically. Number three, you can enjoy the talents of others.

Number four, you'll be able to make better decisions. Number five, it will add some zest and imagination to your life.

[3:46] Did you notice anything about those reasons? Four out of the five reasons, we're completely and totally self-centered. It's going to benefit you, it's going to benefit you, it's going to benefit you.

Not to mention, there's shallow reasons. Now, do I think it's good for us to hang out with people who are different from us? Yeah, I do.

And so does God. But God seems to have deeper reasons we should hang out with people that are different from us.

And as we come to this part in the book of Acts, our title is Acts, just do it. Be who you are. Let God use you to fulfill His mission. Here in chapter 11, we're going to see that, be ready.

Maybe the gospel is for people not necessarily like you. The gospel is for people not necessarily like you. People different from you.

[4:47] Different from me. Maybe people you don't have things in common with. But the gospel is for them. The gospel is for everyone.

Let me put it in a statement for you. The gospel is for people not necessarily like you. We're called to proclaim the gospel to all people, even those not necessarily like us.

Because God welcomes all kinds of people to come and experience His love in the Lord Jesus Christ to show that He is a gracious and compassionate God towards sinners.

That's why. Here in our text, actually from last week, chapter 10, a bunch of Gentiles believed in the gospel.

What do we do now? Say, the Jewish Christians. What does this mean for the future of the church? God confirmed He was working among Gentiles.

[5:51] And now the church is going to confirm that. And that's what we see here in our text. God's plan and His initiative toward Gentiles, it faced strong criticism, strong opposition from the circumcision clique.

They complained to Peter, you're hanging out with Gentiles, with uncircumcised men. You're having table fellowship. You're telling them the gospel.

You're not supposed to be doing that. But we're going to see how Peter explained the whole story. How God directed the entire event, leading him to preach the gospel to this man and his whole house, and now the Holy Spirit fell upon them.

God brought His blessing of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ to Gentiles, without them being circumcised. Now for us, it's not a big deal. But at that time, it was huge.

He granted to them repentance unto life, which should lead to His praise, as well as a whole new focus for missions. The gospel is for all. So God declared Gentiles, who confess Jesus' lordship, clean.

[7:08] They're clean. And the Spirit's baptism is the main sign the new era had begun. But the church found this revolutionary event highly controversial.

And you're going to see how later on, in verse 18, they kind of quieted down, but eventually it's going to rise up and mound up again, till you have another conflict take place in chapter 15 of Acts. We'll see that in a few weeks. But God has begun a new thing in Christ. One writer says this, God has removed the social barrier between Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus' promise of the Spirit was sure proof that God was working among them. In the same way He was working with the Jews, all are one in Christ.

And God is the only one who could grant them repentance. So not only is faith a gift from God, but so is repentance.

[8:11] Both are gifts from God, given to the sinner. The sinner who's granted the ability to exercise those gifts, based upon the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

Here's what happens. The Spirit regenerates, or changes the will, changes the heart. God gives the gifts of repentance and faith, and the sinner responds by exercising repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Salvation is all of God. So now, what are going to be the implications of this text for us today? The implications are going to be this.

We are exhorted to reach out to all, even those that are way different from us, or those that are not like us, or maybe even a threat. Though they don't seem to fit in with us.

It's not about them fitting in with us, but if they've been accepted by God through Jesus Christ.

Friends, this also goes for people who come and visit us on Sunday mornings.

[9:19] It's not about simply being polite or nice. That's important. It's good. I'm glad we should be polite and nice. But we should be welcoming. The first, second, fourth, twentieth, fiftieth time.

Now, I understand. There's caution. Someone visiting for the first or second time, there's caution.

Where are they at? Where are they coming from? Not so sure. I get that.

I understand. But which side should we err on? Should we err on the side of caution? Or should we err on the side of welcoming? I think the implication from our text is we should err on the side of welcoming.

It's hard because it challenges us in this way. So as we come to this passage, I'm going to give you five points that we need to remember.

Five points for us to remember as we ponder the truth that the gospel is for people not necessarily like us. So the gospel is for people not necessarily like you.

[10:26] Here's five points for you to remember as we ponder that truth. Okay? Let me give you five of them. Number one. Expect not like you people to believe.

Expect not like you people to believe. Verse one. The apostles and the brethren throughout Judea, they heard that the Gentiles also received the word.

Gentiles positively responded to God's word, the gospel. To receive the word is to receive the gospel message. How exciting! This is great!

At least we would think it would be. But not everyone thought this way. We'll find that out in a few moments. Friends, be prepared.

If we desire God's church to grow, if we want to see people respond to Christ, if we want to make an impact in this city, then we must expect people to respond to the gospel who are not like us.

[11:33] Maybe don't dress like you. Look like you. Act like you. They may make you feel uncomfortable. Maybe you make them feel uncomfortable.

But that's why God is gracious and slow to anger. The gospel is for all kinds of people. Every type. Do we have that mentality?

Do we have that focus? So expect not like you people to believe. Expect not like you people to believe. That's the first point to remember.

Here's number two. Beware of having a critical spirit. Number two. Beware of having a critical spirit. The second point to remember as we ponder the truth that the gospel is not for people, the gospel is for people not necessarily like us.

Notice verse 2 and 3. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them. Unfortunately, instead of joy, those of the circumcision criticized Peter.

[12:47] for receiving these Gentiles, for having table fellowship with them, for hanging out with them, for telling them the gospel. The problem was both fellowship with them and the message of salvation.

You're not supposed to be doing that. Those of the circumcision. Who are these people? Hebrew or Jewish Christians who believe Gentiles needed to observe the law, stay away from unclean foods, be circumcised, and participate in the covenant.

Maybe these are the ones who are going to cause some major problems later that Paul had to deal with in the book of Galatians. Maybe these are going to be the same psychos. And instead of being excited about Gentiles responding to the message, Wow!

No way! That's phenomenal! They were critical! They were critical! As one writer says, quote, Some old ways die hard in the new era.

You and they were Gentiles. Explain yourself. Look, if the Gentiles are going to join us, then they must become Jews. You should know that, Peter. Oh, may God give us grace to show grace because He's been so gracious to us.

[14:15] Instead of us having an attitude of criticalness, judgmentalism, nitpicking, fault-finding, we should be kind, positive, encouraging, complimenting, beware of the critical spirit, friends.

We should look for evidences of God's grace as people come and they're not like you. As people come and they're kind of making you feel uncomfortable.

Beware of the critical spirit. Look for evidences of grace because God has been so gracious to you. Did you not see that? I mean, there's a method to my madness or a madness to my method in the songs that I choose on Sundays.

I choose those songs on purpose to coincide, to correlate with the passage that we're looking at. Have mercy on me because of your steadfast love.

Amazing grace. Grace and peace. The matchless king of all would die for me. There's a point to that.

[15:27] I'm not as psycho as people say. We're trying to focus on the gospel and if we're trying to focus ourselves on the gospel and God has been so gracious to us, should that not get rid of our critical spirits?

I'm speaking to myself too. I'm in this just as much as you are. Expect not like you people to believe.

Beware of a critical spirit. Number three. Respond graciously to criticism. Respond graciously to criticism. As you see people being critical, how do you respond to them? Respond graciously. Verse four and following, kind of to verse eight I guess, because you see here in verse four, Peter began to explain to them in early sequence.

I was in the city of Joppa praying in a trance. I saw a vision. Object coming down. A great sheet came right down to me. I fixed my gaze. I'm observing four-footed animals from the earth.

[16:30] Wild beasts, crawling creatures. So, Peter's retelling the story that we looked at in chapter 10 just last week. He's retelling the story from his perspective. He saw the sheet descend.

He notes four categories, not just three. He basically retells the story word for word. He talks about later on, we can see that in verse nine, verse nine, verse ten, that God did this three times.

So, Peter's attitude is gracious toward these negative, critical accusers. This is Peter. He could have just went, excuse me?

I've like been with Jesus. Who the heck are you? I ate with him. Come away. Instead of using his authority, intimidation, threats, bullying, or just being plain mean to them, he graciously responded to them.

So, what do you do when another member is responding in a critical spirit instead of grace? You show grace. The same grace that God showed you is what you show to those who are being critical.

[17:55] You show grace. That's what they need. They need grace. Grace means undeserved favor. They don't deserve it, but neither did you.

grace. They don't do it. That's how we need to respond to those who are critical, judgmental, nitpicking, fault-finding. Just give them grace. Which is harder. Because we think they need what? A good, swift kick in the pants, don't they? And they do. And you do it. You do it graciously, though. Graciously.

They don't kick in the pants. Remind them of the gospel. Remind them of God's grace. Remind them of God's compassion. Expect, not like you people, to believe.

Just expect that. Beware of being critical. Third, respond graciously to criticism. Number four, don't stand in God's way. Don't stand in God's way.

[19:01] Look, if God welcomes all kinds of people to come and experience His love in the Lord Jesus Christ, to show that He is a gracious, compassionate God to sinners, we should not hinder Him. And when we're critical and judgmental like that, you're hindering Him.

You're preventing that. We are preventing that. That's in verses 9-17. More or less.

In verse 7, when Peter saw the animals, the Lord said, arise, Peter, kill and eat. He said, I have no means, Lord, nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth. A voice came from heaven a second time.

Well, God's cleansed. No one are considered holy. And this happened three times. And everything was thrown back up into the sky. It took a bunch of times before his racial, religious prejudice to be overcome.

And Peter, the apostle, and it took the Lord himself speaking. And the implications of this would be huge.

[20:10] This would affect missions, the doctrine of the church, the rule of the law of Moses for Christians. Jews and Gentiles can have table fellowship now as a way to express the fact that they share in holiness in God's new community.

The law of Moses has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And now we're under the law of Christ. Loving him, serving him.

So the old covenant, the law of Moses, it functioned as a way to identify God's people and separate them from the rest of the world. But now, friends, in Christ, God's people are identified by the gospel of Jesus.

That's how we're separate from the world. That's how we're identified. It's because we're in Christ. Not because of race, not because of ethnicity, not because of how you dress, but because of Christ.

Verse 11 and 12, that moment three men appeared before the house in which we're staying. They were sent from Caesarea. 12, the Spirit told me to go without them. Go with them without misgivings or without showing discrimination, literally.

[21:30] Don't show partiality because they're Gentiles. Peter, hello. God in his providential sovereignty, right at the time that the vision was done, the three men showed up.

Hey, are you Peter? We're looking for you. We're looking for you. And then he says, verse 12, towards the end, and these six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's house. The number of witnesses went with him, six. So included here is seven, far beyond the normal two to three in the Old Testament, two to three witnesses. So all of them, all seven of them would validate the whole historic event.

And notice he says, we enter the Gentiles home without discrimination. Peter's point is, look, here's the point. We are trying to be obedient to God's word. God told us to do this.

so we're being obedient. 13. This man reported us how he'd seen the angel in his house sent to Joppa, have Simon who's also Peter brought here.

[22 : 36] He will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household. He related the story given to him by the Gentile. Notice, he doesn't name him. Why?

How come he doesn't name him? Because he forgot? No. Because of what or who Cornelius represented, he represented the Gentiles.

And notice, he added something else here too, that the angel said, there'd be a message by which he and his household would be saved. See that? So, putting it all together, it became clear to Peter that God commanded him to offer this Gentile and his house salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what I was supposed to do. And the vision that he had prepared him to do that. And it so impressed Peter that the fact that these Gentiles are ready, they're willing, they're waiting to hear Peter's message.

So, notice 15. As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as upon us at the beginning. Now, remember the word of the Lord, how he used to say, John, baptized with water, and you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

[23 : 47] when Peter began to speak, in other words, before he even finished speaking, as he's speaking, he's had more to say.

The Spirit fell upon the Gentiles, just like he fell upon the Jews at Pentecost. We pointed this out last week, right? They had not been baptized. They had not been anything like the Samaritans. the Spirit just fell upon them, just like the beginning. The distribution of Jesus' promise of the Spirit's coming came upon the Gentiles, just like it did upon us.

The Holy Spirit granted them repentance and to produce life, saving faith in Jesus as both Lord and Christ. All the blessings of the Messianic kingdom was theirs, i.e.

the Holy Spirit. And then he quotes Jesus, who quoted John the Baptist, before being taken up into heaven, the Spirit's going to come.

[24 : 52] And then he says that same gift was given to the Gentiles. So it means these people are cleansed and also indwelt with God's divine presence. It's the same gift Spirit, the same one.

Friends, when the Spirit came, the new era or the last days had begun. And then what is part of that new era, what is part of the last days, is the literal verbiage of Acts 2, 21.

Everyone, everyone, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. that means Gentiles too. A Gentile who believed the gospel and received the Spirit can be considered clean.

As the Spirit in His work purged Israel, so He has purged these Gentiles and now the two have become one and is called this thing the church.

church, not the building, people. All those who trust in the gospel of God's grace are sanctified by the Holy Spirit being part of God's new community.

[26 : 06] The Holy Spirit is the one who defines God's people, not the law of Moses. So now Gentiles, they share a common faith with the Jews.

The division has been eradicated. Jews and Gentiles are now one in Jesus. It's talked about in Ephesians chapter 2. He made two into one new man in Christ. They both have access to the Father and the Spirit through the Son.

So now the crescendo, verse 17. Therefore, if God gave to them the same Spirit as to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?

Who was I to prevent? Who was I to hinder? Therefore, if God sovereignly distributed to the Gentiles the same promised Spirit as to Jews, how could Peter, anyone else for that matter, hinder or prevent them from being included within God's new community?

No one should stand in God's way. No one. anyone who stands in the way of fully incorporating anyone into the body of Christ, those who repented and trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, they stand

in opposition to Christ himself, to God himself.

[27 : 34] This is Peter's point. This is what's driving what he's saying. So we see here positive and negative reasons to accept Gentiles.

Positive, God gave them the same gift Spirit. Negative, you better beware of opposing God. So what's the implications to this? Friends, this is why membership in a church is so important. People say they're Christians but see how the church confirms the work God had done in heaven? Do you see this? in the text? God has given the local church the authority to affirm, to verify, to confirm a person's profession of faith in Christ.

I mean, how can a person say they are a Christian and yet not be connected to a local church? To make a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus, it demands connecting oneself to a local church. It just demands it. It connects you. You're a part of it. Now, this membership doesn't save you. Praise the Lord. Jesus saves you.

[28 : 48] Amen? Jesus saves you through the means of faith alone. the Spirit comes upon you and indwells you, making you a part of the body of Christ.

So, how does this body of Christ practically express itself in the local church? how does the body of Christ practically show itself in what it does and everything?

The local church. What's another implication from this? How can a member of a church say they're connected to a local church when they're not around?

Oh, see, now you're stepping on toes. is it like being a member at a gym but you only go once or twice a month? Friends, our membership should be deeper than that, right?

Aren't we family? That'd be the idea, I guess. Ooh, kind of stepped on toes on that one, so let's review the different points.

[30 : 00] Expect not like you people to believe. Beware of a critical spirit. Show grace to criticism. Fourth, don't stand in God's way. And number five, a fifth point to ponder as we think about the fact that the gospel is for people not necessarily like us.

Number five, God is a gracious giver. God is a gracious giver. Notice in verse 18, when they heard this, they quieted down.

They glorified God saying, well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance unto life. The complaints, the criticisms stopped. They glorified God for initiating salvation, not just for Jews, but for Gentiles.

Acknowledging the fact that God was the one who brought this about. He grants repentance unto life. When God acted, repentance and life were the results. The criticism stopped.

for now, there were probably still some who remain uneasy about the whole thing. Inevitably, tensions would mound up to the Gentile debates.

[31 : 17] In chapter 15, we'll look at that in a few weeks. By the way, after this point, Peter ceased his work among Gentiles.

He didn't work among Gentiles anymore. At least as far as recorded in the book of Acts. Maybe he did later on, but it seems like Peter's main focus was to the Jews. And that's why you see from chapter 11 into chapter 12 and chapter 13, a transition from Peter's ministry into Paul's ministry, Saul, who became Paul, because Saul or Paul was the one who was going to be towards the Gentiles.

By the way, by the way, notice how this is not a potential for repentance.

You see that? The Gentiles, God has granted the Gentiles also the repentance unto life. It's not a potential repentance where God makes it possible, but then it's up to the person to respond.

No, it does happen. It's not potential, but actual, definite. A person will respond. It's not like God, who just made repentance possible, is there kind of wringing his hands, oh, I made this possible, I just hope they respond.

[32 : 39] It doesn't work that way. No, when God grants repentance, it gives life. When God gives you repentance, you respond. Are you here, and have you not responded?

Are you here, and do you need to respond to Jesus? Do you need to repent and trust in Christ? The only religion in the world where it's not what you do, but what Jesus has done.

You put your trust in what he has done. Turn away from sin and put all your hope in Jesus. That's what makes Christianity so distinct. It's because we rest upon what Jesus has done.

You can't get acceptance from God. There's no way you can. Only Jesus does. You must connect yourself to him. And by the way, when we're talking about repentance, it means one radically

reorients his or her life in total allegiance and devotion to Jesus.

You repent of sins, yes, it's true, but it goes farther than that. You reject anything that can hinder your relationship with Jesus. do you get that?

[33 : 47] You reject anything that can hinder your relationship, whether it's addictions or people or relationships, anything that's going to hinder that, you can get away from that.

Because you want Christ, you want Jesus, you want faith, you want him. That's what makes Christianity different. it. Which is also why repentance in a Christian's life is ongoing.

It's not just a one-time thing. Oh, I did that 50 years ago. You're supposed to be doing that now. I repent now. I trust in Christ now. I am trusting Jesus. I'm repenting and trusting Jesus now.

Which, by the way, you're going to get to express that tangibly by eating the bread and drinking the juice, reminding you of his body and his blood. He's shed for you.

Praise his name. God had prepared the hearts of these Gentiles so that they could hear the message of hope and love in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[34 : 47] And so that they would respond in repentant faith in the Lord Jesus. And God had prepared their hearts totally apart from Peter. Peter wasn't even involved in that process of the heart preparation.

He was somewhere else. God was preparing Cornelius' heart and the household's heart. And the Lord Jesus Christ, he brings this reconciliation, brings reconciliation not only with God himself but also between people.

God's new community will be a diverse city. People equal in status. Having peace with each other who fall down at the cross humbling themselves before God.

that's the type of community we're talking about. It's this community. We're diverse. We're all equal in status because we're equal because we come to the cross and there's peace with each other.

God brings all people groups into one in the Lord Jesus Christ. He takes Jews and Palestinians, Saudis and the French, Yemenis and Mexicans, Canadians and Filipinos.

[36 : 02] He takes Japanese and Koreans. He takes Chinese and Koreans and binds them all together in the gospel of Jesus.

That's something that you can't have in this world, can you? And then he takes drug addicts and pimps, gang bangers and drug dealers, prostitutes and porn stars, gays and lesbians, bisexuals and immoral heterosexuals, wife beaters, feminists.

And he changes their wills, he grants them repentance and saves them in Christ and God changes their lives. changes their lives.

And yet that's the challenge, isn't it? That's the challenge that we're glad for other people to be a part of us so long as they're just like us.

But that's not how it works around here. That's not how it works. God is so let's be careful.

[37 : 26] Let's be careful. It's not about people being just like you or me, but it's about people who respond to the gospel and display that grace and mercy toward each other because of God's gift of repentance.

People not like you, they believe. You're being aware of your criticalness. You're responding graciously. you're not hindering God and you realize God is graciously gracious to sinners and so should we.

And let's make membership in this church, to this local church, count. Let's make it count. That we're connected to each other, we're committed to each other and to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ready to share and welcome all in Jesus like this. Does that make sense? take a few moments. Ponder what we've seen in God's word. A few moments of silence so you can ponder and think and pray through what we've seen in God's word in Acts chapter 11. After a few moments, we'll do our time of giving and then we'll sing one song and then I'll give some instructions and thoughts for you about the Lord's Supper.

[38 : 48] take a few moments and ponder what we've seen in the scripture this morning. Thank you.