



“The Power of Grace”

Acts 11:1-18

Acts: The Unstoppable Gospel

I. Context

Acts 10 describes the conversion of Cornelius and his family. Acts 11 describes the church’s reaction to it. This is the first time a group of Gentiles is saved in the Book of Acts, and it marks a major turning point. The church must answer a question that cuts right to the heart of the gospel: “When Gentiles come to faith in Christ, what happens to them?” Do they have to be circumcised? Do they have to follow the Law of Moses? Do they have full, immediate, equal standing with Jewish believers? Should Jews and Gentiles fellowship together in the same church? This dilemma sends shockwaves through the church in Jerusalem.

II. Fear of Change (vv. 1-3)

Acts 11:2-3 – “those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, ‘You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.’”

- Peter’s critics were probably a legalistic party in the church that still held to the Law of Moses (cf. Galatians 2:12). Some of them may have been Pharisees before their conversion. They believed Gentiles had to convert to Judaism to enter the church, which included being circumcised and obeying the dietary restrictions in the Old Testament (Acts 15:5).
- They didn’t object to Gentiles being saved. They objected to Peter entering a Gentile house and eating with them – i.e. he was unclean.

There’s not one passage in the Old Testament which says Jews are not allowed to eat with Gentiles or have social interaction with them.

- Torah repeatedly commands showing love and kindness to foreigners (Deuteronomy 10:19; Leviticus 19:34).
- The word “unlawful” in Acts 10:28 means against tradition – something that is considered socially unacceptable or forbidden by custom. Peter is not quoting Moses or the Old Testament.
- These traditions were manmade rules and regulations, not Biblical commands. They were based more on fear and prejudice than the clear teaching of Scripture.

III. Shocking Revelation (vv. 4-10)

What is the sheet Peter saw coming down?

- Represents the world – four corners of the earth (global implications)
- Represents the Church – comes down from God and is taken up into heaven
- Some of the animals are clean and unclean: they’re mixed together in one group with no differentiation or division.
- The unclean animals represent Gentiles, but now all are declared to be “cleansed” (v. 9)

Two conclusions:

1. Old Testament dietary laws were brought to an end. (Fulfilled in Christ.)
2. Every supposed barrier between Jewish & Gentile believers was removed.

IV. **Surprising Grace** (vv. 11-17)

Key word = “same”

- Gentiles received the same gift – the Holy Spirit (v. 17).
- Gentiles received the Holy Spirit in the same manner – “*the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as he did upon us at the beginning*” (v. 15). This is a Gentile Pentecost!
- Gentiles received the Holy Spirit by the same means – faith.
Acts 11:17 – “believing in the Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. Acts 10:43).
- Gentiles enjoyed the same result – “*repentance unto life*” (v. 14).

V. **Joy of Unity** (v. 18)

F.F. Bruce – “Their criticism ceased; their worship began.”

Charles Spurgeon – “After this the power of grace was so mighty, that these Jews could no longer withstand it.”

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

1. Why does Peter say it’s “unlawful” for a Jew to associate with a foreigner or visit him? (Acts 10:28)
2. Is there a person or group of people you would have a hard time accepting and fellowshiping with if they became Christian?
3. What are some ways we can overcome our prejudice?
4. What are some of our manmade church traditions that can separate us from other believers if we’re not careful?