

Restore Small Group Questions - Acts (Week 19) — “Fishing Fallout” — 6/15/2025**Scripture (NIV) -**

Acts 11:1-18 - The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him 3 and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.” 4 Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: 5 “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. 6 I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. 7 Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ 8 “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ 9 “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ 10 This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. 11 “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. 12 The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. 13 He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. 14 He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’” “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. 16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 17 So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?” 18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

Galatians 1:6 - I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

Philippians 3:2-3 - Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—

Galatians 2:11-14 - When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

KEY POINTS: We have all faced criticism or constructive feedback at times in our lives. Sometimes, it is hard to determine which is which. Equally hard is how to respond to criticism or constructive feedback. We have to ask ourselves how do I handle them?? Peter also faced criticism and constructive feedback. In Acts 11 Peter faces criticism from fellow followers of Jesus because he went fishing in forbidden waters and caught a

mess of Gentile fish. In light of that criticism, there is a perceived problem with leadership within the early church as Peter is criticized for eating and staying with Gentiles, forbidden for Jews. His fellow apostles attacked him and condemned his actions in their hearts. Peter was guilty until proven innocent. When Jesus was with them, He was the lightning rod for criticism but now, Peter was learning what it is like to be criticized and how to respond. This was especially difficult because it was coming from within the church. The problem played out in 3 phases:

1. **The Approach** - The apostles approached Peter with accusations, not affirmations or questions.....a human issue that judges before investigating. We all need to hold up the mirror and assess how we handle criticism or conversely how we criticize another without seeking to understand. Depending on how we handle criticism we could find ourselves on the opposite side of an issue in direct opposition to God Almighty.

2. **The Critique** - Peter's situation was basically circumcised vs. uncircumcised; a question of obedience to the law in the OT in order to access Jesus and salvation. This directly questions 'works based salvation'. Cornelius led a repented lifestyle but there was no salvation until Peter preached and the Holy Spirit showed up and didn't require circumcision or the OT law to be fulfilled for Him to bring salvation. This thinking required a major change. Change was not accomplished overnight, Paul, the apostle, dealt with this circumcision issue in Galatians 1:6 and Philippians 3:2-3 (above) and we still deal with it today...it is called legalism....the notion that we have to do things to gain approval. In a later instance, Paul found fault with Peter and, in front of the disciples, asked Peter why he forced Gentiles to follow Jewish customs. In this case, it was justified criticism. (See Galatians 2:11-14 above) as opposed to the earlier unjustified criticism.

3. **The Response** - Peter handled unjustified criticism well by recounting what God had done and that he (Peter) was following what God had asked him to do. Instead of going into a self-preservation mode and lashing out, he chose to provide a considered, measured response to the criticism. Peter presented 3 pieces of evidence —(1) The vision from God (verses 5-11); (2) The witness of the Holy Spirit (verses 12-15,17); (3) The witness of the Word (verse 16). This evidence proved the legitimacy of what happened to Peter. Important to note is that all 3 must be in alignment to **know** what you have seen, heard, and experienced are from the Lord.

CONCLUSION - When was the last time you were criticized for something you did in faith as you followed Jesus? How did you know whether it was from God or not?

- Relying on experience alone or "feel" can be deceptive....seek also the Holy Spirit and scriptural foundation to calibrate your response. You may need factual authentication from the Bible.
- Be wary of sentiments of 'feel good' or 'follow your heart'
- Bible only can lead to pride and legalism. A good mixture of experience, Spirit resonance and God's word is needed.
- Be careful when using our words in a negative way — — Is it constructive feedback or is it criticism.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The apostle Luke, as the writer of the Book of Acts, did not hide the fact that Peter was criticized by the believers for associating with and eating with the Gentiles. Why do you think Luke pointedly called out the believers?
2. As we see in this sermon message, God is in the process of changing theology of 'us vs. them' between the Jews and the Gentiles. What does this say about putting tradition above God? What about our biases, stereotypes, that need to be checked?
3. Understanding who we are in God instead of differentiating ourselves from others is key to disrupting boundaries. What boundaries do we erect in our lives, in our churches and our relationships with others that 'safeguard' our privilege?
4. Why was it so difficult for Peter and the believers to see others as fully human, fully clean after years of seeing and treating them as other than clean and human. Do we still do this today? The Bible says 'God shows no favoritism from one human to another'.....How should God's attitude affect our penchant for criticizing others?
5. God's spirit will work despite, through, or prior to our traditions, boundaries and barriers. Peter said (verse 11:2) *"The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us"* Has God ever disrupted and interrupted the boundaries you may have constructed? How did you respond?
6. What would you call 'legalism' in the Christian Church today, i.e. rules, human doctrine, rituals, tradition, bias etc.
7. Discuss the 3 pieces of evidence that Peter used to diffuse and reverse the criticism of eating with Gentiles — — Experience, Spirit and Word (see above). Why is it best to incorporate all 3 in responding to criticism or being critical of someone?
8. The Jewish believers respond to Peter's story (defense) with surprise, but with acceptance, even gladness. Discuss how their response should be the model (1) how other Jews should react to Gentiles coming to faith, rather than to try to add the Mosaic Law to God's grace and (2) how Gentile Christians react to others that supposedly don't meet our standards of Christianity?