

Peter Unjustly Criticized

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[0 : 00] Take your Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 11. Acts chapter 11. We are going to read the first! Acts chapter 11. Acts chapter 11. We are going to read the first 18 verses. Acts chapter 11.

! The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him.

And said, you went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them. Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened.

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. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts and reptiles and birds of the air. Then I heard a voice telling me, get up, Peter, kill and eat. I replied, surely not, Lord. Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth. The voice spoke from heaven a second time. Do not call anything impure that God has made clean. This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. 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. He told us how we had seen an angel, how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, send a Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. 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, and he as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said, John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? Who was I to think that I could oppose God?

[2 : 29] When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, so then God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life. Life is full of transitions and changes. You transition from childhood to adulthood, from high school to college, from singleness to married life, and then to children, and then to empty nest, and then to retirement, and then to singleness again by way of death of a spouse.

And some of these transitions and changes are more difficult than others. Well, the same thing is true in the Bible, that God's people have gone through transitions. There was life in Egypt, and then there was life in the wilderness, and then there was life in the promised land. There was life without kings, and then there was life with kings. But by far, the greatest transition was from the old covenant to the new covenant.

Life before Christ, and life after Christ. Think of the huge changes that that made for the people of God. The ceremonial laws, the ceremonial laws, for one thing, in the old covenant, the old testament.

All those animal, bloody animal sacrifices. That's done, and we transition to the one sacrifice for sin, Jesus Christ, once for all. There's those ceremonial laws of circumcision, and all the dietary laws, the purity laws of uncleanness, the feast days, the Aaronic priesthood. They had all fulfilled their purpose, and so they were abolished, and now they are no more in the new covenant. And then there was the place of worship in the old covenant. First in the tabernacle, the moving tabernacle, then in the settled temple of Jerusalem. That's where you had to go to worship and sacrifice in the old testament.

But now, place does not matter anymore in the new covenant. Christ having come, comes and meets with his people wherever they gather in his name, in all nations of the earth. And then there's the change in the makeup of God's people themselves. In the old covenant, it was primarily a Jewish thing. They were the one chosen nation, weren't they? Out of all the nations, I've chosen you, and not them. And yes, Gentiles could join them, but they had to become Jews to become part of the people of God. But now in the new testament, membership in the people of God has opened up to the nations. And Gentiles, as Gentiles, are welcome to come in as they are if they believe in Jesus. The old partition between Jew and Gentiles has been broken down in Christ. Well, these are tremendous changes taking place. And we find them taking place in the book of Acts. And we need to remember that Acts is a transitional book.

[5 : 51]

The church is growing from the old covenant into their new covenant clothing, if you will, and learning the changes that are true in the New Testament. Last week in chapter 10, we saw the Lord Jesus open the door of the church wide open to the Gentiles down at Cornelius's house. That just by repenting and trusting in him, Cornelius and his household were saved, baptized, and added to the church, the one body of Christ. And they became fellow heirs together with the Jews who believed in Jesus. And they shared the same status, the same privileges, the same promises, the same blessings. And so we considered the difficult thing that this was for the Jews to let go of, their privileged status. And now to share it with uncircumcised Gentile believers in Jesus. And to see them not as second-class citizens, but as equals in the family of God, that was hard for many reasons. And even Peter was not easily convinced, was he?

But the Lord Jesus went to great lengths to patiently teach him and to lead him through this transition, to no longer make a distinction between Jew and Gentile. They're one in Christ Jesus. Now, if you didn't think that it was such a big thing for Peter to step into a Gentile's house, just wait till he gets back home to Jerusalem. And you'll see how revolutionary that small step was. And it is one thing to convince one man, the apostle Peter, the leader, a leader of the church, about this change. But it's quite another thing to convince the whole church about that change. And Peter will find that out. So let's dig into the next chapter here of Jesus building his church and now leading them through this transition from old covenant to new and the difference it means for the body of Christ concerning Gentiles being included.

Well, the news, the news of Cornelius and his household trusting in Christ and being baptized into the church spread like a California wildfire. It quickly became the hot topic of conversation among believers throughout all Judea. Have you heard? What? Well, about the Gentiles. What about them? They have received the word of God. Can you believe it? That non-Jews would accept the word of the God of Israel?

No, that really is something. Tell me more. And so bits and pieces of what happened at Cornelius's house were gossiped throughout the land. In fact, the news got back to Jerusalem before Peter did, because he had spent a couple days there with Cornelius and his household before returning home.

And so here he comes into Jerusalem fresh from the revival. Everybody in the house believed in Jesus and his heart's full of exhilarating joy at the great things God had done. And he's greeted with a carping criticism of some uncircumcised believers. You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them. Shame on you, Peter. You know better than that.

[9 : 48] And even before giving him a chance to speak, this welcoming committee of judgmental critics were accusing him of wrongdoing. That's what the word criticized means. It means they judged him.

It means they blamed him. It means they took sides against him. They divided over him and said, you are in the wrong. Now, their criticism was wrong in so many ways. First of all, it was uninformed.

They hadn't even bothered to get all the facts, had they? Proverbs 18.13 says, it's the fool who answers before listening. And that was what they did. If they had the facts of the matter straight, they would have been rejoicing with Peter rather than criticizing him. But no, they didn't get the facts first. They had heard, they thought, the facts, all the facts they needed. And they'd already made up their minds and pronounced judgment. It was an uninformed criticism. And then next, it was unjust.

Peter did nothing to deserve this. All he did was obey God. It was unjust. It was unfair. And then it was unloving. It was not kind. It's not putting the best construction on the facts that you have until you hear from the person themselves. It was a rush to judgment. And then lastly, it was un-Christlike.

It was un-Christlike. It was totally uncalled for. And folks, sometimes Christians do this very thing to other Christians. It was believers who did this to Peter. We need to see that.

[11 : 43] And if it happened to the Apostle Peter, don't be surprised if you should be on the receiving end of unjust criticism from your brothers and sisters, even for your faithful service to God, as Peter was criticized. So don't be surprised if it happens to you. And then let us all be very quick or be very careful to not be quick to criticize our brethren.

Now, it's not as though we don't understand their criticism. It all makes perfect sense to us. These Jewish believers were probably just being concerned about the Old Testament purity laws and those dietary laws, just as Peter had been just a week earlier, before the vision and all this happened, and before the Lord corrected him.

So we understand where their criticism is coming from, even though it was wrong. Now, their criticism is all so human. It's so human nature that we may miss the devil in it.

And this is what we must not do. This situation of abolishing the ceremonial laws and the distinction between Jew and Gentile, this whole transition into including the Gentiles in the church as equals, presented a ripe occasion for the enemy of the church, Satan, to stir up trouble.

And he's never far from the church. I'm glad you're here today. But we need to know that Satan comes to church.

[13 : 30] He and his hellish crew come to church. And they come and they snatch up the word of God before it can settle into your hearts and you can do what it does. But they're always seeking to stir up trouble.

Here is a tremendous opportunity for him to stir up trouble, to create confusion and disagreement. And if the devil is not in the foreground, believe me, he's always in the background, working his evil as we hear even the hiss of this serpent and the criticism that's coming at Peter from his own brethren.

And he's seeking, the devil seeks to rip apart, to divide and conquer and destroy the church that Jesus is building. And so we see him doing this work even here in Acts chapter 11.

So don't miss the larger theme, this larger theme of the book of Acts. Jesus is building his church and Satan and all the rulers of hell are doing their utmost to tear it down and to oppose it.

And sometimes he will use sticks and stones of unbelievers outside the church to destroy her. Oh, but more often he uses judgmental criticism of believers to do his destructive work from within the church.

[14:55] Remember, Satan is called the accuser of the brethren. And he delights to find those inside the church who will do his devilish work for him. With a critical judgmentalism that destroys the unity and peace of Christ's church and leaves the church limping along ineffectively, carrying on the war for King Jesus.

Now, brothers and sisters, our Captain Jesus has preciously protected us here against this kind of thing, splitting us and dividing us and leaving us at each other's throats.

But we've heard of enough church splits and enough stories at pastors' fraternals and conferences.

We've heard enough to scare us to pray and watch earnestly against this enemy. And it's not hard to understand why Satan would rage against the church and why he would be found in this scenario doing everything he can.

The Gentile nations have been his for hundreds and thousands of years. They've been under his control for thousands of years. He's kept them in darkness and bondage.

[16:26] He's kept them deceived with his lies. And the gospel light has been shining over here chiefly upon Israel. But Satan has had his way with the nations, the Gentiles.

And the last thing he wants is for Gentiles to hear the truth that exposes his lies and sets them free from his dominion. So he's fighting tooth and nail to keep gospel light from coming to the Gentiles.

And if he can just get the church fighting over this issue, maybe it will slow the work of the Great Commission to go to the ends of the earth. We understand the reasoning behind the enemy.

And so what we're watching here in Acts chapter 11 is another chapter in the greatest war of the ages between Jesus and the serpent being fought for the never dying souls of boys and girls, men and women.

The stakes could not be higher. And this particular battle involves Peter receiving unjust criticism from other believers on an issue that did threaten to split the church right down the middle between Jews and Gentiles.

[17:43] Now how good are you at handling criticism? How good are you at handling unjust criticism? Are you touchy when criticized?

Prickly? Oversensitive? Thin-skinned? How we handle criticism is a window right into our hearts. And it demonstrates which is reigning there.

Humility or pride? Criticism. Unjust criticism. Will reveal what's reigning at the moment in your heart. Any criticism can be hard to take to our proud flesh.

But few things are harder than unjust criticism. When you know that you've done nothing wrong. And yet it comes. That's the kind Peter got that day as he came back to Jerusalem.

You can identify with Peter. You're in the story. And it provides an ultimate test of our hearts. Now just as Elijah is held up before us in the book of James as an example for prayer.

[18:51] And as Job is held up before us in the scripture as an example of patience under trial. Even so, Peter is a good example to us on how to handle unjust criticism.

I don't want you to miss it. And I want you to see and to follow his example. Not only in what he did, but in what he didn't do. Because that's as important as what he did.

So first, what did he not do? What did Peter not do? Well, there were three responses of the flesh. He didn't quit. Or pout in self-pity.

Lord, I was just doing what you told me to. And is this what I get for serving you? I'm done. Let somebody else do it then. Ever felt that way?

Or if not to the Lord himself, then perhaps to the accusers, the critics. If this is how you're going to treat me, people, then I'm out of here. I don't have to put up with this criticism.

[19 : 49] I'll go find some people who appreciate me. And Peter wouldn't have had to go far. He's just come from a place where people were literally falling at his feet.

And hanging on every word that he said. And now this. He gets home. And he's treated like dirt. Why should he put up with them when others would treat him far better?

And so some people just pack it up and quit when they're criticized unjustly. Or withdraw into a sulking silence. Licking their wounds in self-pity.

But not Peter. Secondly, he didn't retaliate. He didn't say to these Jewish brothers, You know, your blaming me just shows what know-nothings you are.

I mean, you don't even know that God now accepts Gentile believers in the new covenant? Duh. Are you so dull that you haven't figured out that those purity laws about eating with Gentiles?

[20 : 58] And touching unclean food and people? They're over with. They're abolished. And that Christ has made all foods clean? Those were only in effect till Messiah came.

And now there's nothing wrong with eating all kinds of food. And eating with Gentiles. When are you going to wise up and get with the program? You ever felt like retaliating when someone unjustly criticizes?

I know you have. That's natural. That's the sinful flesh within us to do to others. And that's what the Bible calls it, doesn't it?

He calls it getting even. Revenge. Paying back evil for evil. You criticize me. I'm going to criticize you. We're seeing it in the debates.

We've got our full of it. But God forbids it. God forbids it. We do not retaliate. Tit for tat.

[21 : 56] Evil for evil. It only stirs up anger. It escalates the problem. And Peter didn't do that either. Thirdly, he didn't pull rank and waive his badge of apostleship.

Don't you know who I am? After all, I'm one of Christ's chosen apostles. He handpicked me. There were only 12 of us. And I was one of the three inner band closest to him.

How dare you criticize me, an apostle? So, neither did he say what the Roman Catholic Church would claim for Peter. Don't you know I'm the first pope?

And that the church and everything, the first pope and everything I say on spiritual matters is infallible and beyond questioning. Who are you to question me? I'm the first bishop of the church.

He didn't play his authority card. No. Now, Peter was more than capable of responding in all three of those ways and more. But he found grace in Jesus Christ to rise above the flesh, to live like more than natural human beings, and to live supernaturally.

[23 : 09] To live a life that doesn't make sense unless it is explained by God Almighty producing the fruit of the Spirit, the likeness to Christ in Peter.

Proverbs says, a fool shows his annoyance at once. And that's what those three wrong things are. You unjustly criticize me?

Pop! Showing your annoyance at once. Quitting, pouting, retaliating, pulling rank. No, a fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.

That's what we find Peter doing. He was insulted. He was an apostle. That's no small thing. He did do exactly what God told him to do.

And for it, he gets criticized. But he overlooked the insult. How differently the book of Acts might read if Peter had shown his annoyance at once and had not overlooked their insult.

[24:16] If he had flown off the handle and given them a piece of his mind. But instead, he wisely overlooked their insult. He was not overcome by evil, but he overcame evil with good.

Well, what was the good that he did do? Well, just this. He graciously and patiently answered his carping critics. Patiently, graciously and patiently answered his critics.

Now, I think Peter saw himself in these critical brothers. Because without the special revelation from the Lord Jesus, Peter would have been just as critical of anyone who did what he had done.

I mean, just a week or so earlier, he'd even been critical of the Lord Jesus. When he commanded him in the vision, get up, kill and eat.

Surely not, Lord. Surely not. Three times he told him. After the Lord had told him, don't you call something unclean that I've made clean.

[25:19] Surely not, Lord. Never touched anything unclean. Eaten anything unclean. And yet the Lord had been ever so patient with him. Teaching him.

Correcting him. Over and over. Giving him more information. So now Peter is patient with others who are criticizing him. He knew the difficulty of the issue.

He had wrestled with it. He knew how hard it was for himself. And so he overlooked their insult. He identified with them. He stooped. And his intention was to lead them into the truth.

Just as Jesus had led him into the truth. So Peter patiently walks them through the same process that the Lord Jesus had just brought him through.

And that's why chapter 11 starts out sounding a whole lot like chapter 10. There's a lot of repetition. But there's not a word of vain repetition. It's all important, you see.

[26:16] And verse 10. Verse 4 tells us Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened.

Now that means he rehearsed it in great detail. The events of the whole story. All the facts that he was given. And the full explanation of those facts.

We just have a little summary of it here. But Peter went into great detail explaining everything precisely as it had happened.

He even adds some things in his explanation here that we didn't read of in chapter 10, you see. He's even drawing out, giving more facts. He doesn't give them a shortened, edited version.

The way a man can do when he's been away all week and gets home and his wife asks him what happened. And he's able to skillfully summarize a whole week into two sentences.

[27:19] Amazing way with words, fellas. And I've heard people say that that's just a guy's way of telling a story in contrast to a woman's way of telling a story.

But they obviously haven't met my brother, Stan. He's on vacation so I can talk about him. When he tells you what happened, it takes ten times longer than it did to live through it.

You get full color commentary. And you feel like you're right there reliving it with him in slow motion.

And we love him for it. We understand. We get it. And we do. Well, that's what Peter did here with his critics.

He patiently gives them the whole nine yards, sparing nothing that he was giving. If only it might help them understand the will of Christ for his church.

[28 : 23] Can I ask you, how long did it take for you to understand the doctrines of God's sovereign grace and salvation? Did you get it the first time?

I didn't. How did you respond? I responded violently to it. That's not the God of the Bible, I said. No matter of a few years, I was worshiping at the feet of a God who sovereignly chooses sinners to save because we never would have chosen him.

We're just that wicked. But the point is this. How quickly, when we see, we can turn on those who still don't see.

As if we've always seen and we forget that, you know, it was just a little bit ago that I was right where they are at. And we can be harsh with them and judgmental.

Why can't you see? Well, Peter, he had seen. He had come to see. But it wasn't much more than a week earlier that he couldn't see.

[29 : 29] And he's humbled by that. And it makes him patient. And it makes him gentle. And it makes him not to be critical of his critics, but to seek to bring them along.

Who made you to differ from another? What do you have that you've not received? Then do the same to others. Christians above all people should be the most patient people on the planet.

Because Christ has been and continues to be so patient with us. We love because he first loved us. And we're patient with others because Jesus has first been patient with me.

So let's appreciate the wonderful grace of Jesus in Peter. A man of like passions just as we are. And he's not only patient, he's humble. For as he's telling his critics what happened, And he doesn't skip over the parts that reveal his own sin and weakness.

No, he tells them, you know, when that sheep first came down out of heaven and the Lord said, get up and kill, there were unclean animals in that thing. And I, too, was critical of the Lord's command. And said, surely not, Lord.

[30 : 39] Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth. Wow. Peter's confessing in front of his critics.

And we wouldn't quibble, would we, if he just skipped over the other two times? I mean, how many times does he need to confess? He says it once. But no, Peter's too humble. And honest for that.

The one who had denied his Lord three times now owns that he has resisted the Lord's word. Not once, but three times. I said to him, not so, Lord.

Not so, Lord. Amazing humility, isn't it? He's confessing his own objections, not condemning his critics for theirs. And he's confessing his faults, not to a friendly accountability partner, but to his carping critics.

Do you know that confessing your own sins has a wonderful way of disarming your critics? Our beloved friend and pastor Gordon Hawkins knew what it was to be on the receiving end of unjust criticism.

[31 : 51] And one time he was getting an earful, and when the accusations finally stopped, brother Gordon replied, that's not the half of it. I'm far worse than you know.

And here's Peter. They've criticized him. And he's not just putting up the defenses as if I can't say anything that would put me in any negative light in their eyes, so I'll be very selective with what I retell.

No, he openly confessed. He had the same objections himself. And he had been so stubborn. And he goes on in the same vein.

He says, you know, when the three Gentiles from Cornelius showed up at the house just then after this vision ended, the Holy Spirit said to me, have no hesitation about going with these men.

Now, why would the Holy Spirit have to say that unless Peter had some hesitations about going with them? He's owning men. He's explaining it. I did have hesitations about going with them.

[32:57] I wouldn't have gone with them. But the Holy Spirit gave direct revelation from God to me that I should not have any hesitations and go with them.

You see, brothers, I too had the very hesitations you do. Again, he's identifying with his critics. He's not saying, how could you ever think this way and criticize me?

But rather, I too was just as you are and needed much correction and direction and information from God. And when Paul commands the church in Ephesus to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace, he lays out the kind of character and behavior needed for unity and peace when he says, be completely humble.

Not a little dose of humility. Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient. Bearing with one another in love. Those are the things that make for peace and that make a searching barometer on our spiritual life.

How much unjust criticism can you just put up with and overlook and bear with, which is the word Paul uses. Can you overlook an insult?

[34:15] Peter did. His master did. Who suffered more unjustly than him. And Peter's the one that tells us that he has left us an example that we should follow in his steps.

He did not retaliate. But he committed himself to him who judges justly. And he overcame evil with good. That's what humility does.

Pride's a touchy thing. Pride will come right back at you if you touch it. It can't bear much of anything without getting bent out of shape. Insults and criticisms can seem too big when we have a big view of self.

But a truly humble view of self, that will make us patient with critical brothers, slow to take offense, overlooking much in love, identifying with them in their faults, and so preserving the unity of the spirit rather than contributing to its destruction.

Well, in verse 12, Peter next identifies six Jewish believers that he'd taken along with him down to Cornelius' house.

[35:26] Now we see the importance of that act. At the time, we might have wondered. Now it's clear. He's offering them as eyewitnesses who can verify the rest of the story from this point on.

They were with him. Here's the facts checkers. If you have any questions, ask them. You see, Peter is offering help to his critics.

And then he tells them about Cornelius' vision, how an angel told him to send a Joppa for me, and that I would bring a message to him through which he and all his household would be saved.

You see what Peter is trying to make plain in this defense? He's saying, it wasn't my plan. Caesarea was not on my itinerary. I was down in Joppa.

I didn't have Caesarea on the plan. It was God himself who fetched me through an angel that went to Cornelius and said, go get Peter and bring him here. You see, they criticized Peter for what he did, and Peter is trying to show them, appreciate, man, this is something God was doing.

[36:31] God was doing something here. Can you see it's him? He's the one that fetched me down to Cornelius' house. And as I began to speak, you see that in verse 15?

That's important. As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. I was just getting warmed up in my preaching, and I had just told them about Jesus' death and resurrection and the forgiveness of sins for all who believe in him.

I had more to say. I hadn't even gotten to the invitation, but the Holy Spirit interrupted my sermon with a special supernatural sign that proved that he had saved these Gentiles and that they had believed on Jesus and they had received the indwelling Holy Spirit.

What was that special sign? It was the same sign that came upon us in the beginning when we were 120. Remember? That special sign that came on us and we all were able to speak in other languages that we hadn't studied before.

That's what happened. The Holy Spirit... I didn't plan that. I couldn't have planned that in a million years. The Holy Spirit hijacked that meeting and he's the one who did that. It wasn't me.

[37 : 47] The evidence keeps saying, this is something God did. They started speaking in other languages just as we did when the Holy Spirit came upon us.

And all that without them being circumcised or becoming Jews first. No, this is the Lord's work. He saved them. He baptized them with the Holy Spirit.

And then he says to them, verse 16, Then I remembered. Then, at that moment, when I saw that the Holy Spirit had been given to them. And how did I see it? Because of this special sign that attended this historic event.

Then, it hit me. And I remembered what the Lord had said. John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

You see, John, men can baptize with water, but only God can baptize with the Holy Spirit. And that's what was happening.

[38 : 48] That's what he did. It was him, not me. Now, how handy that Peter recalled these words of Jesus just when he needed them most. Has that ever happened to you?

The words of the Savior. The Word of God. Just when you needed it most. Now, this remembrance was not due to Peter's memory sharpened by ginkgo biloba or doing crossword puzzles.

Why did he remember at that moment? Because before Jesus left them, he gave them this promise to the apostles. All this I've spoken while I'm still with you, but the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

You see, and right when he needed it, the Spirit of God reminded Peter, oh, that's what Jesus meant when he said, John, baptize us with water.

I will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. So, if God was the one who had baptized these Gentile believers in Jesus with his Holy Spirit, who was I to think that I could oppose God?

[40 : 07] How could I oppose what he was doing? Since God gave them the real inner baptism of the heart with the Spirit, how could I deny them the outer sign of baptism with water? To oppose their baptism and entrance into the church would have been to oppose God to his face.

And I confess to you, brothers, I was not up for that. This was what he was doing and I simply fell in line with it. And verse 18 is such an encouraging verse.

Peter's humility and patient retelling of the story with kindness in his voice won the day. It won over his critics.

It answered all their initial objections as they now saw that Peter was only acting in line with what God had shown him and told him and had done. That it was God himself who had thrown the door of the church wide open to the Gentiles.

So not only did they stop criticizing Peter for what he had done, they started praising God for what he had done. So, here's their startling conclusion.

[41:17] The last thing we've heard from these guys was criticism, unjust criticism. The next time they speak, they've been listening, good for them. And now, so then, oh, oh, God, he's the one who has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.

We get it. Don't overlook the fact that repentance is necessary for eternal life. You've got to turn from your worthless way of life and come to Jesus for real life, eternal life.

You've got to turn, you've got to repudiate your way and come and receive him and his way. Repentance is absolutely necessary for eternal life.

But don't miss, secondly, that repentance is given. Do you see that? It's given by God. It's a gift of God.

So then, God has given even the Gentiles repentance unto life. Repentance is as much a gift of God as faith is.

[42:35] True belief and true repentance. What do you need to respond to the gospel? You need true faith and true repentance. Every grace that brings us nigh without money come to Jesus Christ and buy.

He gives both repentance and faith to receive his son. You see how free a gift salvation is? That even what he requires of you, dear sinner, is provided by his grace.

Come to him with nothing, nothing to buy and throw yourself on his mercy and say with that sinner in the temple, God be merciful to me, a sinner, and save me for Jesus' sake.

Well, for this reason, Christ died and rose and ascended to his throne in heaven as Peter had told the Sanhedrin who were judging him. You know, Peter's been on the end of judgment for a long time.

Remember, then it was the Jewish court of the Sanhedrin, chapter 5 and verse 31, and he's giving his defense, and in that defense he says, God exalted this Christ to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

[43:48] What a wonderful Savior we have that he's exalted as a king and as a rich king. He gives gifts and he's given repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

And now, Peter is standing before some more critics and he's able to even so explain things that his own critics come to that conclusion. That God has even given repentance not just to Israel but to Gentiles, to non-Jews, to pagans, to idolaters, to the most wicked God-haters.

What a Savior. So what have we seen today? Well, we've seen another crisis averted, haven't we? We've seen Satan's purposes to stir up trouble and destroy thwarted.

And we've seen the church's mission that was kind of on the skids perhaps if this got any traction. We've seen Christ's mission and the church's mission forwarded.

how Satan wanted to keep his hold on the Gentiles, to keep the church from opening its doors to the Gentiles, to destroy the church's unity and peace over this very issue.

[45:01] But as that song says, he tried and he couldn't do it. And why couldn't he do it? It was not because Peter was such a wonderful guy left to himself.

It was because Jesus Christ was fighting for his church that day. And that made all the difference Jesus from his throne on high was actively involved building his church, accomplishing his purposes on earth, filling Peter with his Holy Spirit, diffusing the sense, the tense situation with a gentle answer that turned away wrath, supernaturally enabling Peter to act in a way that he never would have acted.

Apart from Christ, Peter could do nothing, nothing but mess up. But now here he is acting with humility and patience and gentleness and forbearance even under unjust criticism from his brothers.

Here is Jesus at work, you see, convincing, not just Peter now, but the whole church and even its stiffest critics that he is the one who is throwing the door open to the Gentiles.

Now go and make disciples of all the nations. And so the way is being paved for what we'll see in the rest to the book of Acts as the church now moves on out, out of Judea and Samaria and Galilee, out into the ends of the earth.

[46 : 24] Jesus successfully bringing his church through this transition. And so that gospel has gone outside of Jerusalem and Samaria and Judea and has made its way all over to these shores and to us here at Bremen, Indiana.

it's about as far to the ends of the earth that you can get from Jerusalem all because Jesus was fighting for his church that day.

My sinner friend, I want you to marvel at the ends to which God has gone to bring you his invitation. All this, all this threatened trouble and stirring going on in the church, all this to make it clear to you, dear Gentile sinner, that if you repent and trust in Jesus, your sins will be forgiven and you yourself will be brought and given eternal life, given the spirit of God to live in you, to enable you to live a supernatural life and you too will join this one great growing family of God.

Now we're not done with this difficult issue. Sadly, this inclusion of the Gentiles, we're going to be bumping into it again in the book of Acts and we're going to come to chapter 15 and see that they had to hold a whole council on this matter.

It was threatening to split the church and sadly, even Peter will need to be rebuked publicly for not living in line with the very truths that he hears speak so clearly, showing us again that Peter is not the hero of this story but Peter's Lord.

[48 : 06] He's building his church. He's demonstrating his glory. How does he do it? Through unjust criticism and taking somebody like Peter who is so impulsive, so quick to speak and causing him to act in a whole different way.

What glory does that bring to Jesus? Peter's been in the yoke with Jesus. He's learned from him and what does he learn from him? He's learned that he is gentle and humble in heart.

Peter's been on the receiving end of that gentle, humble heart. Peter saw his Lord unjustly criticized by the Pharisees for eating and drinking with unclean people.

He saw Jesus take advantage of that situation to teach them about his mission. I've come here as a physician and who needs a physician if not the sick? I've come to seek and to save and I have great joy and heaven has great joy.

when just one of these sinners repent. Peter saw that. Peter was there when Jesus said to him, Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat and I have prayed for you that your faith not fail and when you have turned back strengthen your brothers.

[49 : 30] And that's what we see him doing. Not berating his brothers. They didn't need that. They needed strengthening. And so he takes all the truth that he had been given and he gently and patiently and humbly strengthens his brothers to come to the same conclusion that it is indeed God who has granted even Gentiles repentance unto life.

Well, let's worship such a Christ who's able to create, recreate his life in such impetuous people as Peter and you and me. Number 142 is a fitting response to what we've seen this morning.

142, speaking of what a friend we have in Jesus, could we bear from one another what he daily bears from us? Yet this glorious friend and brother loves us though we treat him thus.

Though for good we render ill, he accounts us brethren still. Let's stand and sing. 142. We ask for grace, our hearts to soften and this Jesus is full of grace, full of grace and truth and from his fullness have all we received and grace upon grace.

Amen.