

Acts 065
Gentile Salvation, Part 10

Acts 11:17-18

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Dr. Andy Woods

Let us open our Bibles to Acts 11:17. Peter has led Cornelius to Christ, up in Caesarea. Now he must travel down to Jerusalem to explain to the church leadership, which was Jewish, that a Gentile really got saved. That explanation is given to us in Acts 11:1-18.

- VII. Peter's Defense in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-18)
 - A. Charge against Peter (1-3)
 - B. Peter's defense (4-17)
 - C. The verdict (18)

Charges are raised against Peter (Acts 11:1-3). "How dare you go into the house of a Gentile, as a Jew, and share the gospel." Peter is offering this defense in Jerusalem, that the Gentile salvation of Cornelius was legitimate (Acts 11:4-17). He has largely retold the story, and last time we spent all of our time on Acts 11:15-16, where Peter explains to the Jerusalem leadership that what happened to Cornelius in Caesarea is exactly what happened to us Jews at the beginning, meaning in Acts 2.

The last time we were together, we were talking about how those verses are loaded with theology. You can use those verses to preach free grace gospel (Acts 2 and Acts 11). You can use those verses to document that the Church started in Acts 2. We worked our way through that, but the theology notwithstanding, do not miss Peter's main point as he is speaking to the Jerusalem leadership: "What happened to Cornelius with the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit is what happened to us Jews at the beginning." That is Peter's conclusion.

We pick it up here with his conclusion in Acts 11:17, as he is speaking to the Jerusalem leadership.

"Therefore, if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

You notice that Peter here is acknowledging that what happened to the Gentile Cornelius is equal to what happened to the Jews. "Jews and Gentiles," Peter is saying, "Within the body of Christ are equal in terms of quality, rank, and measure." That was not always the case, going back to the last 1,500 years before the Church Age started, where if a person wanted to walk with God and grow in God, they had to convert to Judaism.

That has been set aside. Gentiles within the body of Christ are equal to the Jews. That is what Peter means there when he says, "If God gave to them—Cornelius's household, a Gentile—the same gift as He gave us also..."

Notice also how Cornelius got saved. Cornelius got saved by believing. If what happened to Cornelius happened to the Jews at the beginning, then how were the Jews saved at the beginning in Acts 2? They were saved by faith alone. See how that works?

You will notice here in Acts 11:17 that there is one condition that was laid out for Cornelius and his entourage to be saved. It was faith alone. That is always God's condition. Probably the first evidence of it is in Genesis 15:6 (Romans 4:3).

"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Paul, when he defends this doctrine of salvation by faith alone, loves to quote Genesis 15:6 to demonstrate that this is the way God has always worked. The plan of salvation has always been the same. It is just that in the Old Testament they were looking forward to a Messiah yet to come, whose name they did not know, and they were saved on credit. The cost had not been paid yet.

For the last 2,000 years since the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus we are saved in the exact same way, except we are looking backward to a Messiah whose name we do know—Jesus Christ. We are not saved on credit because it has been paid for through the Cross of Christ. All the way through, from beginning to end, there is always a single condition that God holds out for the lost sinner to fulfill. John's gospel is filled with this. It says it about 99 times. Some of the more prominent ones are John 3:16; John 5:24; John 6:28, 29, and 47; John 16:8-9; John 20:30-31.

Passages Conditioning Salvation on Faith Alone (<i>Sola Fide</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Genesis 15:6• John 3:16; 5:24; 6:28-29, 47; 16:8-9; 20:30-31• Acts 16:30-31• Romans 1:16; Ephesians 2:8-9• Hebrews 11:6

In Acts 16:30-31 the Philippian jailer asks life's most important question: "What must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas offered a single condition: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. Paul is going to develop this theme in his epistles, constantly, Romans 1:16; Ephesians 2:8-9. You know Hebrews 11:6:

"Without faith it is impossible to please God."

Genesis 15:6:

"Then [Abraham] believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."

John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Acts 16:30-31:

"... 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...'"

This is so clear. It is amazing how we have been able to mess this up over time. Lewis Sperry Chafer writes,

"...because upwards of 150 passages of Scripture condition salvation upon believing only (cf. John 3:16; Acts 16:31)."

You are seeing evidence of it right here in Acts 11:17, as Peter is explaining how Cornelius came to the Lord. There is just one verb there after "believing." You will notice that faith is only as good as the object it is placed in. You cannot believe just in anything. You have to believe in the right object—in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If Cornelius was saved the same way the Jews were saved in Acts 2, then I have to come up with an interpretation of Acts 2 that harmonizes with Acts 10-11. This is what most people do not do. Many of the kingdom of the cults go to Acts 2 to add works to salvation, such as baptism. They will come up with an interpretation of Acts 2:38 that indicates you cannot just believe in Jesus to get to heaven, you have to be water baptized.

"Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38).

When you are dealing with someone that is in a cult or in a false religion—Church of Christ people will do this to you—they will say, "No, it is not faith alone. It is faith plus baptism, and there it is in Acts 2:38." Last time I was showing you that there is a way to handle Acts 2:38 where you interpret the "eis" ("for") as "because of." That is how the "eis" is used in Matthew 12:41.

"The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah..."

"They repented ["eis"] because of the preaching of Jonah." It is completely legitimate to interpret "eis" as "because of." If that is the meaning, then Acts 2:38 says,

"Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ "because of" the forgiveness of your sins...'"

You are getting baptized in water not to get your sins forgiven; you are getting baptized in water because your sins have been forgiven. You see the world of difference between those two? There are a lot of people that want to get water baptized to get their sins forgiven. That is not what Acts 2:38 is saying. You are getting water baptized because your sins have already been forgiven at the point of faith alone in Christ alone.

At the point of faith alone in Christ alone, your mind changed. You stopped trusting in your self righteousness, and you trusted in the transferred righteousness of Jesus. Your mind changed—"metanoia," which is a translation of the English term "repent." "Repent"

means "change of mind" When did the change of mind happen? When you trusted in Christ. Should we repent or should we believe? The answer is yes. When you do believe—trust in Christ for salvation—what already changed? Your mind. They are two sides of the same coin.

Well, then should I get baptized? Absolutely. Not to get your sins forgiven, but because your sins have already been forgiven. What I have done there is come up with an interpretation of Acts 2:38 which harmonizes with Acts 11. The Church of Christ and the cults and all of these groups are not doing that. They are coming up with an interpretation that goes against Acts 11, which you cannot do, because Peter explains to the Jerusalem church leadership, "Exactly what happened to Cornelius is exactly what happened to us in Acts 2."

If you are coming up with some kind of interpretation of the Bible that is out of harmony with the rest of the Bible, you have to start rethinking your interpretation at some point. This is how false teaching germinates: people have some view of something that does not fit the rest of Scripture. That is one way to check your interpretation and make sure it is accurate. Is it in harmony with the rest of Scripture? The Bible, 150 times or more (probably closer to 160), teaches justification by faith alone in Christ alone. If I am grabbing a verse that is leading me to the opposite conclusion, then maybe I am misreading that verse. These are basic Bible study methods.

What does Peter say after, "What happened to Cornelius happened to us." He says in the second part of Acts 11:17,

"...who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

It is a rhetorical question. "God moved. The gospel was presented. Cornelius and his household got saved. There was evidence of it through the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit. That is the work of God. In fact, it was the work of God that got me in the door." With everything we have been studying and how God put all of the variables into place. What could Peter do? Is he going to oppose the salvation of Cornelius because he was a Gentile?

"Who was I to stand in God's way?" Which is pretty smart, when you think about it. If God is doing something, get out of the way the best you can. If you are not there to support it or promote it or be used of God, do not be in a position where you are challenging what God is doing. I have watched people over the course of time try to oppose God—stand in the way of God. It never really works out well for them.

Peter here gives some tremendous advice. "God moved. It was the obvious work of the Holy Spirit. I realized that what I am saying goes against your Jewish traditions, but if it is between God and Jewish traditions, I am going to pick God." If it is between God and the denomination, I am going to pick God. If it is between God and leadership somewhere, I am going to pick God. A lot of times, churches make decisions that have nothing to do with God. I like to say, "It was the board rather than the Lord." Churches do crazy stuff. I do not want to follow some tradition, if God is going the opposite direction. That is what Peter is saying here, and that is wise advice for us to follow.

At this point Peter has given his defense. They brought charges against him (Acts 11:1-3). Peter has defended himself very ably (Acts 11:4-17). Peter stops talking, and now it is time for the Jerusalem leadership to make a decision. Fortunately, they make a really good decision here. Their verdict is given there in Acts 11:18:

"When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also repentance that leads to life.'"

Three things happen with this verdict. Number one, they stop wrangling. If you go back to Acts 11:2-3, they were really wrangling over this. What precipitated all of these things?

"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.'"

"You violated Jewish traditions. Explain yourself." Well, Peter has done a great job explaining himself, and they are dumbfounded by what they have heard. They agree with his conclusion. "How could you stand in God's way after everything that you have shared with us?" They stop wrangling.

The second thing these church leaders do is glorify God. It says,

"When they had heard this, they quieted down and glorified God..." (Acts 11:18a).

The glory of God is such an important part of our thinking as Christians. Here at Sugar Land Bible Church, we adhere to a system of theology which is known as dispensationalism. That is a scary word to a lot of people, but it has a pretty easy meaning to understand.

"Traditional or normative dispensational theology is a system that embodies three essential fundamental concepts called the "sine qua non" (lit. "without which is not")..."¹

If you take away any of these three things, it is like a stool on three legs—it is going to fall over. The system cannot survive without these three things.

I am summarizing the writings of the one that really simplified all of this for us to understand, Dr. Charles Ryrie. What is dispensationalism? It involves three things:

"The consistent use of a plain, normal, literal, grammatical-historical method of interpretation;"²

I am going to take the whole Bible at face value, including Genesis 1-11, including prophecy. When there is a figure of speech, I will make room for that; but when it says, "Jesus was born in Bethlehem," that is what it means—he was born in Bethlehem. When it says, "Jesus is going to return one day and rule for a thousand years," and everybody

¹ Dr. Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 38-41

² Ibid.

is trying to figure out what a thousand years means, and little old me has the answer—it means a thousand years. You are taking the whole Bible at face value.

A lot of church Christian traditions do not do that. They will take the Gospels one way, but Genesis 1-11 is suddenly allegory; prophecy is suddenly non-literal. That is really the first plank in dispensationalism. Once you become committed to that, you start to see things in the Bible that are obvious, which leads to the second point:

"[The consistent literal method] reveals that the Church is distinct from Israel;"³

The Church and Israel have separate programs; not that they are just separate people, but entirely separate programs. They are two trains running on two different railroad tracks. If that is true, that opens the door for the Pretribulational Rapture. God is coming back at a different time for the Church than He is for Israel. He is coming back for the Church in the Rapture, before the Tribulation period starts. He is coming back for Israel when they are converted at the end of the Tribulation period. Our destiny is to escape the Tribulation period; Israel's destiny as an unbelieving nation is to go into the Tribulation period and be converted through it.

Why do I believe this? Because I want to see it in the Bible? Because I am in love with my theology? No, I have become committed to number one there—I am taking the whole Bible at face value. When you do that, you start to see there are promises to Israel that have never been fulfilled. God has unfinished business with Israel.

The third point of dispensationalism is:

"God's overall purpose in history is to glorify Himself (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14)."⁴

His purposes in history are doxological. Charles Ryrie continues on, and he says,

"God's ultimate purpose for the ages is to glorify Himself. Scripture is not human-centered, as though salvation were the principal point, but God-centered, because His glory is at the center. The glory of God is the primary principle that unifies all the dispensations, the program of salvation being just one of the means by which God glorifies Himself. Each successive revelation of God's plan for the ages, as well as His dealing with the elect, non-elect, angels, and nations all manifest His glory."⁵

Everything God does in history is to glorify Himself. A lot of Christian traditions will say, "No, God's purposes in human history are soteriological, meaning God works in history to save people." Now, there is no doubt that God works in history to save people. The Apostle Paul tells us that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 94.

of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). That is not His ultimate purpose. His ultimate purpose is to glorify Himself, because when a human being gets saved, who gets the glory? God does.

Whatever definition you come up with—what is God's ultimate purpose in history?—it has to encompass all the biblical data. If you think that God's purpose in human history is salvation—soteriological, which is the Greek word for "salvation," rather than doxological, which is the Greek word for "glory"—then how do you explain His dealings with the angels, good angels, fallen angels, Satan, demons?

You go through all the biblical information on angels, and you will discover that the plan of salvation is not open to the angels. Two-thirds did not fall in Lucifer's rebellion, a third did. There is no hope of salvation for them, yet God is dealing with them. The good angels are confirmed in holiness; the fallen angels God has a future program that will not be pleasant for Satan and the demons, or the fallen angels. God is working.

You say, "Wait a minute, I thought God's purposes in human history were soteriological?" No they are not. They are doxological. If you think God works to save, then you have no explanation as to why He is working the way He is in the angelic realm—fallen and unfallen. Whatever you come up with in terms of a definition of what God is doing in history, it is to encompass all of the data. When you define God's purposes as soteriological, then you have no explanation for the other things that He is doing.

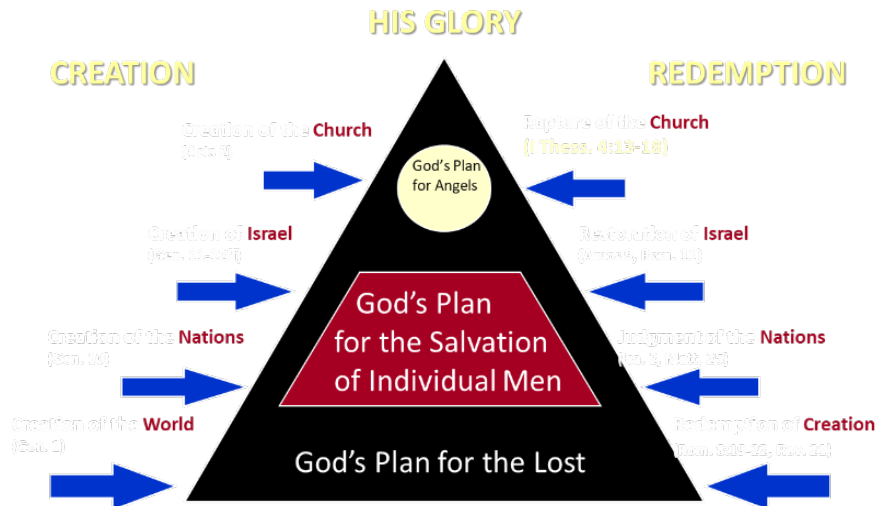
Fortunately for us, God does save us, but even that saving purpose has to be subsumed under His doxological purpose. When we get saved, who gets the glory? God does. What did Jesus say in Luke 15:7?

"I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

What happens when a person repents or changes their mind about Jesus by placing their faith in Him? Who rejoices? Heaven does. Who gets the glory? God does. Even salvation itself is part of God's doxological purpose.

This chart is very helpful. It is from Dr. Michael Stallard, formerly with Baptist Bible Seminary, now with Friends of Israel. He teaches for us at Chafer Theological Seminary.

THE FOCUS ON THE GLORY OF GOD IN DISPENSATIONALISM



Dr. Mike Stallard, Baptist Bible Seminary

You know what is God's overall purpose? It is His glory. Everything that He does relates to His glory. Coming up are the works of God in creation: creation of the world; creation of the nations; creation of Israel; creation of the Church. What is the whole point of it? Even the morning stars sang for glory. Job 38:4-7 tells us that when God was bringing forth the heavens and the earth, even in creation, God was glorifying Himself.

As humanity lost its way (Genesis 3, the fall of man), God began His work in redemption. Redemption of what? Creation, ultimately. There is a new world coming—His judgment of the nations; His restoration of Israel; the Rapture of the Church. Notice what all of that is producing as well. It is all attracting glory to where it rightfully belongs—God. Everything that God does is to glorify Himself. His purposes in history are doxological.

Once you understand that, you start figuring out why you exist. Why are we even here? Why did God bring us into existence? The answer is: to glorify Him. The purpose of our lives, as believers, is to glorify God. That is the big picture. You may glorify God differently than I, or than the person sitting next to you, but we all have as our ultimate purpose to glorify God.

My purpose in life is not to be a good pastor, or a good husband, or a good father. (I hope I am all those things.) My ultimate purpose is to glorify God. I can glorify God by being a good pastor, by being a good husband, by being a good father, but being a good father, being a good husband, being a pastor, is not my ultimate purpose. Those are subsumed under why I exist, which is to glorify God.

When God marked me out for creation, He determined that I would glorify Him. That controls a lot of our thinking. It controls a lot of our behavior. Should I be involved in this activity or that activity? Does it glorify God? Should I be involved in this conversation or

that conversation? Does it glorify God? Should I manage my emotions in this way or that way? Does it glorify God? Life becomes pretty simple when you think about it. We are constantly making decisions based on why we exist, because why we exist is a contribution to God's overall purpose in history.

This is why people can be very unhappy and unfulfilled. You can go through life not having a lot of meaning. Why is that? If you are living outside of why you exist, how could you be fulfilled? Your fulfillment comes from becoming, or pressing into, the purpose for your existence. Can a screwdriver be happy trying to be a hammer? I do not think so, because the screwdriver is meant to be a screwdriver, and the hammer is meant to be a hammer. As long as the screwdriver is trying to be a hammer, it is a miserable experience. You get the hammer doing what it is supposed to do, and it is completely different. You develop fulfillment in life by pressing into your ultimate purpose; and your ultimate purpose, according to this theology, is to glorify God.

"Lord, I am unfulfilled and I am unhappy." The Lord says, "What do you expect? You are living outside of your design." This is, I think, what Jesus was talking about with the woman at the well and others. "You drink from that water, and you will be thirsty again; but if you drink from the water that I give, you will never thirst again" (John 4:13-14). In other words, you will discover the reason for your existence.

This "glory of God" theme is so significant. That is why it is so great to watch these church leaders, steeped in tradition, quieting down after listening to Peter's testimony, and glorifying the Lord. "Cornelius got saved. Praise the Lord!"

Next, they make a conclusion, in the end of Acts 11:18:

"...saying, 'Well, then God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.'"

What just happened, as you look at the word Gentiles, is the Church that is just getting off the ground in the Book of Acts, has taken a quantum leap forward—a massive step forward in terms of their development. This is what Luke is documenting for Theophilus, who is also a Gentile, questioning whether Christianity is for him or not. Luke's purpose in recording the prequel, the Gospel of Luke, and the sequel, the Book of Acts, is to present Theophilus with an orderly account.

By the way, that name Theophilus is interesting. It means "lover of God"—"theos" God; "phileo" love. He was a God seeker. I think there is evidence that he was already saved, the way Luke describes him in Luke's prologue (Luke 1:1-4), but not having the light of a New Testament, he wondered if this whole Jewish thing was really for him, a Gentile. Dr. Luke, who could be a Gentile himself, is explaining to him that Christianity is for him. In fact, they are not even called Christians yet. They are not going to be called Christians until later on in this chapter.

Luke is documenting how this whole movement started to present Theophilus, a God lover, with an orderly account. In other words, Luke is recording history. We know that from the "we" sections of the Book of Acts. Sometimes, as we get further into the Book of Acts, he will say, "they did this" or "they did that." All of a sudden he says, "we did this" or

"we did that," meaning, Luke, for a lot of these things that are happening, that are coming in the Book of Acts, saw it firsthand.

Luke was not an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus. He was not one of the original Twelve; but Paul knew Luke and could testify for Luke's writings. Luke, in his prequel, says that there were all these historical documents floating around ("gospelettes" as some call them), and he took all that stuff—early records of Jesus—and stitched them all together with great detail, because, after all, he was a physician. He had a mind for detail. (If you have a doctor that does not have a mind for detail, you might want to find a new doctor.)

He interviewed people. It is largely believed that he interviewed Mary, Jesus' mother, as he put together the Gospel of Luke—the prequel, and then the sequel, the birth and growth of the Church with Jesus ministering through the Church from the right hand of the Father after He ascended in Acts 1. Luke is putting all this stuff together for the benefit of a God lover, Theophilus, who is questioning whether this whole movement is for him.

He wants to present Theophilus with an orderly account of the birth and growth of the Church, so as to affirm him and what he has believed. Luke gets his point across by documenting the birth and the growth of the Church numerically, geographically, and ethnically. Numerically, we are going to see it in the rest of Acts 11. The church is going to start growing like crazy, particularly in Antioch. It has already grown. Peter preached a sermon and about 3,000 were saved. Then the number jumped to 5,000, and then from then on, it just keeps saying the number of disciples was increasing. This is not a shock to the system because Jesus said,

"I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not prevail over it"
(Matthew 16:18).

The church is developing, according to Luke's historical account, numerically.

It is developing geographically. It has gone from Jerusalem out to Judea and Samaria. It is about to get to the northern tip of Israel, a place called Antioch. Then Paul, from Antioch, is going to launch out on three missionary journeys and take a final trip to Rome in incarceration. That is why there are so many geographical places mentioned in Acts. These are all progress reports to document to Theophilus that this is a real move of God.

Then he also documents the birth and growth of the Church ethnically—how this whole thing started as an offshoot of Judaism. You do not have any full-fledged Gentiles saved in the Church until you get to this man, Cornelius. The Jerusalem leadership accepted the salvation of Cornelius and did not slam the door in his face, but believed what Peter said, that he was saved "the same way we were at the beginning." As a result, the church just just took a major step forward.

We have finally emerged from that section. Do you know how long we were in that section? Ten lessons on Acts 10-11. Why would we do ten lessons on Acts 10-11? Because there is a lot of biblical material there. Why is there a lot of biblical material there on this topic? Because Luke is documenting the ethnic development of the Church, just

like he is developing the geographical development of the church, just like he is developing the numerical growth of the church.

After they glorified God, the leadership said:

"Well, then God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18b).

What does that mean when it talks about "granted to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life"? Here come the Calvinists. Basically, the Calvinists believe that faith is a gift. Because of their lopsided view of total depravity, they look at the unsaved as if they are rocks or inanimate objects incapable of believing. It does not matter if the gospel is preached to them. It does not matter if they have the witness of conscience, creation, evangelism, the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. The fact that Jesus said, "When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to Myself," in their minds it does not matter that God does all that. A person that is unsaved is a rock, and they define total depravity as inability.

If that is their belief, how does anybody get saved? They say, "God has to impart the gift of faith to some." Who are the "some"? The elect. They get the gift of faith; everyone else God passes over. Which is a very, academic doctrine until you figure out that, "Maybe my grandmother, maybe my friend, maybe my associates are not one of the elect." Then it gets personal, does it not? What they are saying is there are some people that are unsaveable. John Calvin himself said, "Doomed from the womb." In other words, they were completely created to experience the wrath of God for all eternity, having been given no choice for salvation whatsoever. Somehow, in a very twisted way of thinking, they believe God receives glory for that.

Dave Hunt wrote a book against Calvinism called "What Love Is This?" This is not a loving God at all. What they are trying to say is this: You are a rock; you are created for destruction. You have no ability to be saved; but there is a small fraction of humanity that can be saved. They are the elect; God imparts the gift of faith to them. Everyone else, He passes over. This becomes one of their key verses that they use, Acts 11:18:

"Well, then God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

The word "faith" is not even found here, but they will take that and they will read that into the text. That is not how I read that text at all. I read it through the lens of John 16:7-11—that is the granting. The granting is the gift of conviction. Once someone comes under conviction, now they have the ability and the incentive to trust in the Savior, without which no one could be saved. What the Calvinists do not explain to you is this conviction goes out to the whole world. Jesus said it would in John 16:7-11.

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away..."

This is an amazing statement, because these disciples were panicked that He was leaving; but He is saying, "No, it is actually to your advantage that I am leaving because when I go, something better is going to come."

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7).

Who is the Helper? The Helper is the "Paraclete"—the One who comes alongside to assist—the help of God. Interestingly enough, the woman in the first marriage (Genesis 2) is also called a helper. Genesis 2:18 says,

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a suitable helper for him.'"

The word for "helper" there is "ezer." When you preach that doctrine to modern-day feminists, they are insulted. How dare you lower women like that? I am not lowering anybody, because that word "ezer" is used of God Himself. Track that Hebrew word "ezer" through the Bible, and you will see that God Himself is called a helper.

Now here we are in the New Testament, and it is the word "Paraclete"—the eternally existent third member of the Godhead. The fact that God called a woman the helper of the man, contrary to modern feminists' reaction to it, is not a put down, because God Himself is called by that same name. The truth of the matter is, Christianity has done more to elevate women than any other single system of thought that has ever been concocted or invented.

Everywhere Christianity goes, women are brought back to their rightful place. You look at what the culture was like at the time of Christ, where the rabbis would say, "Thank God I was never born a woman"; where women were not even allowed to be taught. Here Jesus goes out of His way, not just to a woman, but shall we say, a sexually loose woman (John 4), who was not of the right race. She was a Samaritan, a half-breed; she was not even Jewish. She has all these strikes against her. She is a woman; she is immoral; she is not part of the right race.

If you study John 4, you will see Jesus going out of His way to talk to her. To the point where the disciples following Him are saying, "What are you doing? What are you talking to her for? Why are you talking to a woman? Not just a woman, but that kind of woman." All of this talk about how Christianity wants to put women in chains and all of these kinds of things—it is the exact opposite. Go to a culture where the gospel has not penetrated, and you will see how women are treated like absolute dirt.

We even see some of it here, with some of our cultures that come from Middle Eastern countries—a woman is in a burqa walking five to ten feet behind her man in the middle of the Houston sun, where she is so completely covered that she is looking out of her burqa with the little slits for the eyes. This is what Islam does to women. You want to tell me that somehow Christianity is the enemy to women? It is the exact opposite. Christianity is the greatest friend to women. Women have been elevated, rightfully so, in the United States of America (not coincidentally), in a culture where Christianity has penetrated like very few cultures have.

Just step outside the culture and travel to one of these Middle Eastern countries. I am not talking about the nice hotels they put you in when you are a traveler, where you are seeing

what they want you to see, but go out in the streets and you will see how women are actually treated—how in the Quran legally it is okay for a man to rape his wife; or how multiple female testimonies are needed in a court of law to outweigh a male testimony. Get the movie "Not Without My Daughter" with Sally Field, and you will get a glimpse of what women are treated like in Islamic countries and cultures. I do not even think today, with our political correctness, they would even make a movie like that, but it is very educational.

"Not Without My Daughter" starring Sally Field, whose character married a Muslim man. He said, "We are going to go visit my parents and we will come right back." It is based on a true story, by the way, this came from a book. He took her to Iran. Once he got her over there, he said, "We are not going back." In Islam you are allowed to lie; it is called "taqiyya." The story is how she escaped with her daughter. It is a very heartwarming story in terms of what happens at the end, but it is just an education on this idea that it is not Christianity that is enslaving women. It is Islam that is enslaving women.

It does not demote a woman at all to be called a "helper," because that is what God is called. Men and women, in Christianity, are both image bearers of God. My wife is as much an image bearer of God as I am—male and female. My wife and myself are joint heirs of salvation. She does not have to wait for my approval to get to heaven, as Mormonism teaches concerning women—the man has to escort the woman into heaven, and there are different levels of heaven. That is not taught in the Bible. The Bible is extremely pro-woman and somehow Satan, through the feminist movement has twisted it all around to make it sound like Christianity is the enemy of women. It is the exact opposite.

Now it is true that we play different roles within our marriage. There are leadership roles and submissive roles; but those are not questions of value. Those are questions of what we would call functional subordination. Just like when the Son submits to the Father. He does not lose His deity in the process. When my wife submits to me as the leader of my house, it does not mean that she is no longer an image bearer of God and a joint heir of salvation.

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged" (John 16:7-11).

That, I think, is how to interpret Acts 11:18 when the early church leadership says, *"Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."* It is not imparting a gift of faith to a rock, even though the Calvinists read it that way. It is the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit that goes out into the whole world and makes people aware that they need Jesus. That is a gift. Without that convicting ministry, none of us could even be brought to the point of decision.

You notice here that the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, singular—"*concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me.*" That is the sin that the Holy Spirit is agitating people about. If He was not agitating people about that, no one could be saved. The fact that He is agitating us about that sin is a gift; it has been granted to us. He is not believing for us, but He will put you under the conviction necessary and bring you to the point of decision. When the Holy Spirit does that, it is a gift.

All the early church is saying is, "You know what? That convicting ministry that convicted us Jews at the beginning— Peter, we have heard your testimony, and we acknowledge that the same convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his household." That is why and how he got saved. Do not read the gift of faith into an inanimate object and all of these things into this verse. That is not what the verse is talking about when it talks about "granted to the Gentiles repentance that leads to life." Read it through the John 16:7-11 grid.

We finished the conversion of Cornelius. It is a major topic, as I said before, because of Luke's purpose in writing; and it climaxed with Peter's defense. Then the early church makes this verdict; and the early church, all of the Jewish leadership, just took a quantum leap forward.

For next time, I would really love it if you guys would read Acts 11:19-30 this week, because the subject matter changes to the church at Antioch. Antioch is huge. Not only is Antioch going to be the launching pad for Paul's first three missionary journeys, but Antioch is going to stay the course and hold to a literal interpretation of prophecy for the first two centuries of Christianity after the apostles left the earth.