

“NOW, TO CONVINCING THE OTHERS”
Romans 14:10-18, I John 2:28-3:6, Acts 11:1-18
October 12 & 13, 2024

“Entertainer Garrison Keillor recalls the childhood pain of being chosen last for the baseball teams:

‘The captains are down to their last grudging choices: a slow kid for catcher, someone to stick out in right field where nobody hits it. They choose the last ones two at a time—“you and you”—because it makes no difference. And the remaining kids—the scrubs, the excess—they deal for us as handicaps. “If I take him, then you gotta take him,” they say. Sometimes I go as high as sixth, usually lower. But just once I’d like Darrel to pick me first and say, “Him! I want him! The skinny kid with the glasses and the black shoes. You, c’mon!” But I’ve never been chosen with much enthusiasm.’

“Did you ever think about the fact that you are so valuable to God that He chose you early—with enthusiasm. Ephesians 1:4 [NIV] tells us, ‘*For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.*’”¹

Imagine the great joy that Cornelius and his family and friends had as they claimed Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord and to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. God had sent the Apostle Peter to them to guide them into their new faith. God had chosen them FIRST, even them - Gentiles! They were all valuable in God’s sight and they would have been overjoyed to be included into the family of God as His children.

And imagine Peter’s joy at seeing the Holy Spirit move into the lives of these Gentile believers. The vision given to him in Joppa had become fulfilled and God was calling those who were once thought unclean, clean. More than any of his wildest dreams happened as he humbled

¹ (Van Morris, Shepherdsville, Kentucky; source: Robert Russell, *The Southeast Christian Church Outlook* (June 8, 2000), Louisville, Kentucky. Found in *Perfect Illustration*, Tyndale House, 2002, pg. 75

himself to follow God's call to go to Caesarea to guide these folks into faith in Jesus Christ. He, even he, Peter, had been the mouthpiece of God to bring the saving message of Jesus Christ to this prominent family so that they could believe and become a part of the Body of Christ. He had witnessed God choosing these Gentile Christians for Himself so that they could be included into the family of God.

It was the start of a huge movement that would carry on for years, decades, centuries and even millennia. **Each one of us** are beneficiaries of God sending His servants out to go beyond just the Jews with the hope of eternal life. This great Good News went to every person who was willing to have faith in Jesus Christ. What excitement! What joy! Even the Gentiles were receiving the Gospel of Jesus Christ right along with the Holy Spirit of God. God was providing Salvation for the whole world, and it began right in Jerusalem with the apostles, and extending to the uttermost parts of the world.

But upon returning to Jerusalem, Peter found a very different response to the great work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Gentile believers. Listen to the next portion of the Book of Acts. This is Acts 11:1-3. (READ Acts 11:1-3)

Why is it that when something spectacular happens, there are always those who criticize the work? Instead of being overjoyed that God was taking the message of Salvation in Jesus Christ to the whole world (as Jesus had commanded them to do), many of those in Jerusalem took Peter to task about his going to the home of a Gentile and eating with them. Yes, it was outside of Jewish teaching and tradition. Yes, it was against the practices that they had held onto for a long time. BUT the results were what was important, RIGHT? Many more people were believing in and claiming Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord! Many more were being saved from their sins to find eternal life! Many were being called out of the practices of false religions

and out of the ways of the world to find the ways of the Lord God Almighty through the great work of Jesus Christ! What could be better than that? And more importantly, what was wrong with that?

Well, to some there was plenty wrong with that. Jews just didn't go into the house of a Gentile. It was out of bounds; it was sacrilege; it was just wrong! How could Peter give up all of his training as a Jew and blatantly disrespect the guiding principles of the faith? What was he thinking? "*You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them [!!!]*" (Acts 11:3). What a horrible sinner he had become! How could he even think of being an apostle of Jesus after doing such a thing? Many other thoughts would have been floating around in their minds.

But instead of getting upset with those who were accusing him, Peter simply explains the whole thing. (READ Acts 11:4-18)

So much criticism comes out of ignorance of what is really happening. These men had not been with Peter and the other six when they went to Caesarea, so they didn't know all that happened to cause Peter to go beyond the Jewish guidelines to enter into an uncircumcised Gentile's home to be with them and eat with them. It took Peter's recounting of the event to enlighten them of what God had called him to do. It wasn't an impulsive move on his part to get to know what the inside of a Gentile Roman centurion's home. It was a predisposed, preplanned, and calculated move on God's part to reach more than just the Jews with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Peter was just being faithful to God's call in his life.

In his speech "Citizenship in a Republic" delivered in Paris on April 23, 1910, Theodore Roosevelt made this strong comment to his listeners. "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust

and sweat and blood [that counts. The credit belongs to the one] who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming. [The credit belongs to the one] who does actually try to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself in a worthy cause [that counts. It is the one] who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”²

Peter had been faithful to God’s call to follow Jesus’ command to go out into all the world. **God** had been the One to choose where he went. **God** had been the One to choose who to talk with. **God** knew the hearts and minds of the family and friends of Cornelius, and He wanted them to have the chance to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. And as Peter says, “*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?*” (Acts 11:17).

Folks, there is so much criticism in our world today about so many things. During this political campaigning time before our quadrennial elections, those who are running for office are using every attempt to pull out the dirt in the life of their opponent, criticizing them for everything they’ve done in order to try to make themselves look better than the other. It’s sickening!

But that seems to be human nature, to do our very best to belittle and judge the lives of others in order to make ourselves look better than another for whatever reason. That is precisely why the Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians in chapter 14:10-13, saying, “*You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every*

² (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998] pg. 124)

knee will bow before Me; every tongue will acknowledge God.’ So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgement on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.”

As followers of Jesus, it is not up to us to judge our brothers or sisters in the faith for what they do. Yes, there are times when correction is appropriate, but only when full disclosure of all that happened is revealed. Instead, we are to live our own lives as best as we can, and to encourage each other in the faith so that we might be about the work of helping others find faith in Jesus, too. If we bite and bicker and criticize and belittle each other here in the church, what will the world think of us? Will they see Jesus in us? Will they think that being a Christian is anything different than the rest of the world? Hardly! Will they be encouraged to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, seeing His professed followers devouring each other? I doubt it. Will they desire to continue coming here to this church as long as there is a chance that they, too, might become primary targets of judgement and criticism? Who would want to?

On Thursday night I hear the testimony of a single woman who had been courageous enough not to abort her unplanned children, but gave them life. She made this very glaring statement about the Christian church. “In the eyes of many Christians, it is so much easier to abort an unwanted child than to live with the judgement and shame and condemnation given as I did my best to raise my children as a single mom. One was conceived when I was 18 after struggling through a very difficult and violent divorce of my parents. The other was conceived 12 years later after I was drugged and raped by one I counted as a friend. I chose life for these children, but there is such judgement cast upon me because of that choice. Abortion is a hidden sin, and only few know about it. Being a single mom is very evident to everyone.”

The Apostle Paul instructs us to not judge each other based upon what **we think** is right, but rather to pray about **how what takes place can** bring about the glory of God. An old Native American proverb states, “Never judge a person until you have walked one moon in their moccasins.” That means, never judge a person until you know all the details of what they have done and gone through and find what God is calling them to do **and to be** to fulfill His purpose.

As an alternative, the Apostle John wrote to the Asiatic communities around Ephesus in the first century CE (Common Era). He says, “*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. All who have this hope in Him purify themselves, just as He is pure*” (I John 3:1-3). We are to model Jesus Christ by loving each other as brothers and sisters IN CHRIST, and to work together to bring about the fulfillment of God’s purpose of saving the lost, and giving sight to the blind, and feeding the hungry, and supporting the hurting, so that they might live in the love of Jesus Christ.

The believers in Jerusalem needed to hear what God had done in Peter’s life to know that he was following God’s call and bringing Salvation to those in Caesarea. An appropriate response to “*hearing that the Gentiles had also received the Word of God*” would have been to **ask Peter to tell them all about it**, rather than accusing him of poor judgement and apostasy. Why not let the Apostle explain first, and then let questions be asked to enlighten everyone?

Unfortunately, we are more like “a typical American family [who] was driving home from church. Dad was fussing about the sermon being too long and sort of boring. Mom said that she thought the organist played a little too loud during the second hymn they sang. Sis, who

was a music major in college, said that the soloist sang about a half note off key during most of the song. Grandma said she couldn't hear very well - they were sitting in a bad place. Little Willie listened to all of this and then started to fuss about the woman with this big hat who sat in front of him. He couldn't see around her. And then he nudged his dad and said, 'But, Dad, you gotta admit, it was a pretty good show for a nickel.'"³

God is doing so many great things in this church and throughout this community, and around the world that we should be rejoicing in. If we keep focusing on what is good and right and all that God is doing to bring about His kingdom here on the earth, we won't have time to pick at each another. If we look at all the positive things that are going on in our lives, we won't have time to see the bad things.

It all depends upon what we focus on. If we focus on all the bad stuff, that's all we'll see, and our whole life will be focused on that. But if we look at what God is doing in the lives of people around the world, we'll see the great movement of the Holy Spirit changing the hearts and lives of people **who we thought** were the outcasts and untouchables.

Peter was delighted to help the people in Caesarea find the Salvation of Jesus Christ. He had put his sight upon following the direction of the Holy Spirit guiding him, even if it was completely different than what he had thought was right. He listened intently to the guidance given to him, and he began to see people in a different way. Instead of the Gentiles being the "bad guys," outside of God's grace and mercy, Peter began to see them as ones who needed the Salvation of Jesus Christ so that they could become children of God. He began to see as God sees, looking for the time when all people would turn back to Him and follow the Lord Jesus.

That's the opportunity we each have today, to submit ourselves to the will of the Holy

³ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, pg. 126)

Spirit and begin to see others as God sees them. We are all in need of God's mercy and grace through Jesus Christ, and as we lean in to go beyond the limitations and standards put out by other people, to follow the leading of the Lord, there will be multiple opportunities for us to be a part of letting others see that God is ready to choose them as valuable and necessary to be on His team. As we give ourselves to serving the Lord Jesus, we'll be able to share His love with others, helping them to find eternal life in Him.

There's a great Gospel chorus that goes like this, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace." A second verse could also uplift us, "Turn your hearts unto Jesus. Look full in His mercy and grace. And the love of Christ will go blazing on, in the hearts of the lonely and least."

The critics of Peter were only able to rejoice in the work of God in the lives of the Gentiles as they gave up their quick criticism, and understood the great work of the Lord taking place all around them. As they humbled themselves to the Salvation of Jesus Christ, they began to see as Jesus saw, and they were filled with the joy of the Lord bringing hope and life to all.

May that be our goal today, and always, so that we might be open to following God's guidance in our own lives to bring hope and life to those around us. Let's pray.

Father, it is so easy for us to criticize others, even before we know the whole story of what happened. Please forgive us of our impertinence! Help us to see with new eyes, not judging each other, but speaking gently with those around us and treating them with the love they need to see their place in the family of God. Help us to boldly listen to and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, regardless of what others say or do to us. Give us the courage to live like Jesus, showing love first so that everyone might have the chance to grow close to You. Move us to change our hearts to love one another, in Jesus' Name we pray. AMEN.