

NO PARTIALITY
Acts 10:23-11:18

Throughout the week I watched, as most of you probably have also, videos of the war going on in Ukraine. Videos like that of a Russian fighter jet launching a missile right next to a family's home or tanks running right over innocent civilians with no reason. I can't imagine seeing those scenes outside my living room window and the reality of it struck home hearing the cries of children in the background. One of things that this invasion by Russia of Ukraine should do is cause us to long for Christ's return when He will execute **perfect justice** in the world. It will be a time where there are no unjust wars. Nation does not take up sword against other nations, and righteousness, peace, and justice become the chief characteristics of that time period (Is. 2:1-4). As Christians, we long for a new heaven and a new earth where all nations with all of their diversity come before the throne of God to worship Him with no more war or death or sin natures to cause it (Rev. 21-22).

What is going on in Ukraine is contrary to that ultimate hope and to what is pictured in today's text where two groups who are normally at odds with one another and hated each other, become one in Christ Jesus. Jew and Gentiles (non-Jews) will find reconciliation in Christ, the One who has removed the hostile barrier between them (Eph. 2:14-18). In Acts 2, the Church was born, and God is making it clear that He is doing something new by including the Gentiles but it takes some convincing because this is a barrier that has existed for hundreds of years. And like I said last week, *"It's hard to teach an old dog new tricks."* This is one of the biggest transitions in all of God's program where we're going from *Israel and Mosaic Law* to now the *Church under grace*, controlled by the *law of the Spirit* and made up of primarily Gentiles soon – and it's going to cause a cultural and theological earthquake for the Jews.¹ If you'll remember from last week, God has shown Peter a vision 3 times that was meant to change not only his diet, but also his heart for the Gentiles – teaching him that **God shows no partiality** – and we're going to continue looking at barrier-crossing principles for us if we're going to advance the gospel. If you missed last week, this is one of those times where it would be really helpful to go online and catch up on the first part of the story. But let's pick up the story in verse 23.

*23 "And on the next day he [Peter] got up and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. 24 On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man." 27 As he talked with him, he entered and *found many people assembled. 28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me [through the vision] that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. 29 That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me."*

*30 Cornelius said, "Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, 31 and he *said, 'Cornelius, your prayer*

has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.’ 33 So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

I. PETER MEETS CORNELIUS. (VV. 24-33)

Remember from last week that for Peter to enter **Caesarea** and a **Gentile’s house** was like entering enemy territory. It was deeply frowned upon as a cultural taboo – not according to God’s Law, but according to manmade laws. **Jewish traditions** in the **Pharisaical oral law** prohibited Jews from entering the homes of Gentiles and eating with them or befriending them because they taught it would make them unclean, or defiled.ⁱⁱ All God’s Law said was for Jews to remain distinct from the Gentiles through things like dietary laws, but it didn’t say they couldn’t have social contact. In fact, they were to help Gentiles understand the one true God (Deut. 10:17; 2 Chron. 19:7). The reason for this manmade legalism was because hundreds of years earlier Israel had been pummeled and exiled to Babylon by God for letting Gentile nations influence them with their false gods. So not associating with Gentiles now is an over-reaction to never let that happen again. Before we give them a hard time, just think about how many ridiculous manmade rules churches have come up with that become barriers to gospel advancement. A lot!

Barrier-Crossing Principle #1 – Champion God’s Word of grace and not man’s word.

We want to make sure that how we operate according to the Word and not to stuff that’s made up by men. The Church has suffered so much gospel advancement by promoting manmade that create unnecessary partiality. One of the manmade philosophies infiltrating churches today and teaching them to show partiality is Critical Race Theory. It teaches people to identify others by the color of their skin. So we become more concerned about appoint “representative” races rather than the most-qualified people. This is why our president nominated a black woman to the SCOTUS this week. He said he chose the most qualified individual but how will we or she ever know if she really was the most qualified candidate when to begin with he eliminated from consideration all who weren’t black women? That is being partial. He’s choosing based on skin color. **CRT** and the **Equality Act** throw gasoline on what little racism flame was flickering and in the article I wrote I tell you why. God is showing Peter that we need to think the exact opposite of that in the Church and He demonstrates how serious He is by repeating Peter’s vision to him and in His Word.

II. PETER’S GOOD NEWS. (VV. 34-43)

*34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. 36 The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, **preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)**— 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and*

*healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. 40 God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as **Judge of the living and the dead**. 43 Of Him all the prophets bear witness that **through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.**”*

Peter’s message here can be broken down into 2 main partsⁱⁱⁱ. The first part is that:

BCP #2 – God is the God of the nations. (vv. 34-36)

He says God does not show **partiality**. He does not show **favoritism** but in “*Every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.*” That’s not teaching salvation by works or that all roads lead to God (most of the world believes that!), but that everyone is welcome to Him who genuinely seeks Him. Just the opposite to universalism, we learn from the context that even though Cornelius fears God and is doing religious things, **he is still not saved and needs to hear the gospel** (11:14), which is the whole reason God sent Peter. Peter’s point is that God is not interested only in the Jews receiving the gospel, but all nations. He offers salvation to all – whether you’re Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, male or female, slave or free. And we all get into heaven the same way – through faith in Jesus Christ. As they say, “*The ground is level at the foot of the cross.*” Why should we cross ethnic and cultural barriers to reach the lost? Because they need to hear and believe the gospel.

BCP #3 – Jesus offers salvation to all. (10:37-43)

Jesus said this in John 10:16, “*I lay down My life for the sheep [Jews]. I have other sheep [Gentiles] which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.*” This new era where there is no partiality between Jews and Gentiles as one flock has begun and I think Peter mentions **John** the Baptist because he was the bridge between the old era and the new era that Peter is calling them to embrace.

BCP #4 – Jesus removes the sin barrier between us and God.

Romans, also, typically had many gods that were over certain areas and had the mindset that all roads lead to God – worship whoever you want to worship. But Peter makes it clear in verse 42 near the end of the message that Jesus will be the **Judge** of every man. We’re all accountable to Him and the only escape from judgment is through Him. What Jesus did, affects every man, leading them to 1 of 2 destinies: heaven or hell. We’re all destined for hell but **everyone who believes receives forgiveness of sins** and is **reconciled** to God. He is the one who can remove the barrier between Jew and Gentile and He is the one who can totally remove the **sin barrier** between us and God. Now as Peter is preaching this good news, they believe and are saved.

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. 45 All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 47 “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” 48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

III. THE GENTILES’ SALVATION. (VV. 44-48)

As this small Gentile congregation hears the good news of the gospel, they believe and are immediately baptized by the Spirit of God into Christ. The Spirit is poured out on them, evidenced by their speaking in tongues just like what happened in Acts 2. Tongues just means languages, like my native “tongue” is English. This moment has been called the “*Pentecost of the Gentile world.*”^{iv} This external tongues manifestation of the Spirit is important here because it lets everyone know now and later that these Gentiles have received salvation without question. It makes the Jews, who experienced the same thing, more readily accepting of the Gentiles (11:18). It sends a clear message: we’re all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks (1 Cor. 12:13).

I think the whole point of the gift of tongues had to do with convincing the newborn church that the gospel was for the nations. The reason for tongues in Acts 2, when all these Jews from all over the world were present, showed them that God wants to take the good news to all nations – all languages. It has the same significance here. If you are still thinking through what this tongues gift is, my recommendation is that you go through Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12-14 several times writing down the way tongues is described, keeping the context of Acts in mind. When you think of them as the ability to speak in a foreign language without learning it, it makes sense. So does the need of an interpreter when there is no one there who speaks the language. It is also described as a revelatory gift like prophecy and knowledge that would **edify** people if translated. Spiritual gifts are meant to edify others, not self, so it’s not good when it was being abused in Corinth along with other things. Paul also mentioned tongues would one day cease (1 Cor. 13:8).

The order of events here is very helpful. They **heard** the message; they **believed**; they were **saved and sealed** for eternity as the Spirit baptizes them; they spoke in **tongues**; they were **baptized** in water. This order helps us understand that **salvation is not dependent on anything but faith**. There was **no altar call**; there was **no laying on of hands** like with the Samaritans; no **water baptism**; no going to the **temple** or being **circumcised**; not even a **prayer to receive Christ** (though I think that can be helpful at times to solidify a moment of salvation in our minds). The Spirit comes without delay to give them new life in Christ on **one condition: belief**.

BCP #5 – Faith in Christ is the one condition for salvation.

It’s a perfect example of Ephesians 1:14 says, “*In Him, you also after **listening** to the gospel of your salvation – having also **believed**, you were **sealed** in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise who*

is given as a pledge of our inheritance.” Belief is the only condition. **It’s not what we do but trusting/believing/putting our faith in what He did for us.** Having believed, they then are baptized with water in Christ’s name, identifying with Christ.

From there it says Peter stays a few days, no doubt eating with Gentiles with a free conscience and more importantly, continuing to teach them. I found another good barrier-crossing principle there.

BCP #6 – Grow in Christ through the Word.

A lot of people, I have no doubt, are believers but their spiritual growth has been severely stunted because they don’t like to read or they’re too busy for the Word. Pray that God would help you enjoy reading His Word because baby Christians aren’t supposed to be babies forever. Peter says, *“Long for the pure milk of the Word so that by it you may grow in respect to your salvation”* (1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:12). The writer of Hebrews reproved his readers for not being able to digest solid spiritual food. We need to grow so we can be effective tools in God’s hand for outreach.

I Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, 3 saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” It appears they are not even happy that Gentiles were saved without going through some ritual induction according to the Law of Moses. I think this snippet is preparing us for the party of “the circumcision” that will plague the church throughout the New Testament, though it ends well on this occasion as Peter gives his defense that this was all God’s doing.

IV. THE GENTILES’ ACCEPTANCE. (VV. 1-18)

*“4 But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying, 5 “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me, 6 and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air. 7 I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ 8 But I said, ‘By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ 9 But a voice from heaven answered a second time, ‘What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.’ 10 This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky. 11 And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were staying, having been sent to me from Caesarea. 12 The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man’s house. 13 And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; 14 and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’ 15 And as I began to speak, **the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning.** 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 17 **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?" 18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

So when these offended Jews hear how God divinely orchestrated all of these events, their response was that they glorified God! Peter says to show partiality or deny God's reception of the Gentiles would be to **stand in God's way**. That's awesome. It means God is serious about reconciliation.

BCP #7 – The gospel reconciles people with God and people with other people.

It breaks down the wall between Jew and Gentile and can bring reconciliation in our relationships as we learn to extend forgiveness and grace and mercy to others. The gospel heals and brings life. **Life** in v. 18 is a reference to salvation – having new, eternal life, starting now by being born of the Spirit. This is **the life that Jesus died to bring to all men who will receive Him**, regardless of who they are. In sum, let's remember these great truths that extinguish partiality in us.

BCP #8 – All men are created in God's image and Jesus died for all.

If you want to fight partiality (racism) you have to aim for the heart because man doesn't have a skin problem, he has a sin problem. Man's pride that causes it is found in the sinful human heart and he needs to be born again by the Spirit of God. This means the greatest thing we can do to fight injustice is to reach out with the gospel and teach God's Word. Those who have experienced *infinite* and *undeserved* mercy, grace and forgiveness are much more likely to extend that to others **without partiality**.

There's a popular story about prejudice standing in the way of the gospel. Story has it the infamous Hindu teacher, Gandhi, was intrigued by Christianity after reading the Bible. He believed that the teachings of Christianity would solve the oppressive, multitiered caste system problem in his home country of India. One Sunday morning, he went to attend a Christian church service in Calcutta but was stopped at the entrance by ushers who wouldn't let him into this particular church because he was neither white nor from the high caste of Indians. At that moment, he turned his back on Christianity and said, "*I'd be a Christian, if it were not for the Christians.*" There's something to be said here about how we shouldn't let fickle men be a wedge between us and God. But there's also something to be said about how necessary it is for us as Christians to be truly just. One of the ways we do that is by crossing ethnic and cultural barriers to reach people Jesus died for.

ⁱ Steven Ger, *Acts: Beginning in Jerusalem...*, 161.

ⁱⁱ Ger, 157.

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights, Volume 5* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016), 205.

^{iv} F. F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts, Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 216.