

37. Peter Reviewed His Vision

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain why the Holy Spirit first came on the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles as a group. We also saw that Peter had to learn that God treated all people equally and did not discriminate against the Gentiles or any other group. In order for Peter to learn these things, God had revealed that he was to go to the house of Cornelius and explain what God told him to say. In our topic today, we will see that the believers back in Jerusalem were upset that Peter had eaten with the Gentiles. As a result, Peter had prepared in advance to explain what the Lord had done.

Acts 11:1-3 says, “Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, ‘You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!’” The apostles and all of the believers who lived in Jerusalem heard that the Gentiles had received the Word of God. Although none of the New Testament books had been written yet, the followers of Christ all recognized that the message about the death and resurrection of Christ was the Word of God. In fact, Cornelius had also recognized that fact when he said, “Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God,” as recorded in Acts 10:33.

When Peter arrived back in the city of Jerusalem, he was immediately confronted by the circumcision. The word translated “circumcision” was used to refer to Jews who had been circumcised according to the instructions in the Old Testament. The word translated “contended” means *to make a distinction or to discriminate* and was translated by the word “doubting” in Acts 10:20. By their words, these Jewish followers of Christ were trying to separate themselves from Peter and what he had done when he went to the house of Cornelius. They made it very clear that they were against Peter for going to the house of a Gentile and especially for eating with uncircumcised Gentiles.

They showed their anger about what Peter had done when they said in the words of Acts 11:3, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” Even though Peter had preached on the day of Pentecost and had been one of the key leaders of the early church during the first several years of the church, this action caused many of the believers to be angry. James 2:4 says, “Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” In this verse, the word translated “contended” in Acts 11:3 is translated “partiality”. This verse points out that the accusation made against Peter, by many of the followers of Christ, showed that they had become judges with evil thoughts. They felt very strongly that Peter was wrong to eat with Gentiles.

We mentioned in our last topic that Peter had taken six other Jews with him that were also circumcised, because Peter expected this opposition when he returned to Jerusalem. As a result, we will see that he had also brought these men to Jerusalem with him. Acts 11:4-6 says, “But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying: ‘I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed

animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.” Here, we see that Peter gives us an example of the way to respond in love when other Christians accuse us for doing something with which they do not agree.

We see that Peter began explaining in order the things that had happened before he went to the house of Cornelius. The word translated “explained” means to *declare or explain something in an orderly fashion*. Notice how this word is used in two other verses. Acts 18:26 says, “So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” Apollos was preaching about Christ but only knew what John the Baptist had taught about Him. Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and explained to him about the death and resurrection of Christ so that he could teach more accurately. Then, Acts 28:23 says, “So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.” Here, we see that Paul explained in an orderly fashion to the Jews in Rome all that the Old Testament taught about the death and resurrection of Christ.

When we are controlled by the fear of people, we will become angry and argue. When we are led by the love of Christ, we will realize that other people need something explained more accurately and will take the time to explain whatever needs to be explained instead of arguing. Our attitude of love and concern will cause most people to listen to what the Word of God says and then the Holy Spirit can work in their hearts and lives to give them fuller understanding. In contrast, if we argue to prove that we are right, we may win the argument, but will lose the opportunity to help people grow in their understanding of the Word of God. Christ showed love even to those who disagreed with Him.

Peter began explaining all of the events in an orderly fashion beginning with his time of prayer as he prayed on the housetop in the city of Joppa. Peter said that he was also in a trance or state of amazement as the Lord spoke to him in a vision. He said that he saw an object coming down from heaven that was like a great sheet held by the four corners. Acts 10:10-11 says, “Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.” Peter said that he saw this object come to him as it descended.

Peter said that he observed this object intently. The word translated “observed it intently” means *to fix the eyes on or to gaze upon*. This is the same word that is used in Acts 1:10-11 to tell how the disciples looked up into the heavens when Christ returned to heaven. Those verses say, “And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.’” Peter gazed at this object that looked like a sheet held at the four corners with the same intensity that he had watched Christ return to heaven. The word translated “considered” means *to think about so as to understand*. The word is translated “observe and look” in Acts 7:31-32 where we read, “When Moses saw *it*, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe,

the voice of the Lord came to him, *saying*, “I *am* the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses trembled and dared not look.” The burning bush was so amazing to Moses that he could not fully understand. Peter made it clear that he really tried to understand what God was teaching as he looked at these wild animals, creeping things and birds.

Acts 11:7-10 goes on to say, “And I heard a voice saying to me, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But I said, “Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.” But the voice answered me again from heaven, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven.” Here, we see that the Lord had to explain this amazing thing to Peter in the same way that Peter was now explaining it to the leaders of the church at Jerusalem. Peter made it very clear that he had never eaten anything that was common or unclean.

Peter said that the voice from heaven said to him, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” Just like the believers in Jerusalem, Peter said that he had tried to argue with the Lord. However, God showed great love to Peter and calmly explained to Peter that whatever God cleanses is not to be called common or unclean by His followers. Here, we see an important key for our own spiritual understanding. The night before His crucifixion, Christ had told His disciples, in John 14:26, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” We can know that the Holy Spirit will teach us the things that we do not understand if we will seek His help. 1 Corinthians 2:13 says, “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” Here, we see that the Holy Spirit teaches us by helping us learn to compare Scripture with Scripture. Instead of depending on our own understanding, we need to pray and ask the Lord to guide us to other passages of Scripture that will help us to understand what the Lord wants to teach us and help us to understand.

Peter also mentioned that the Lord had given him this vision three times. We need to realize that we will not understand many things the first time that we read them. In fact, Peter later wrote, in 2 Peter 3:15-16, “And consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures.” Even Peter found it hard to understand some of the things Paul wrote when he first read them.

To help our physical and spiritual children come to a clear understanding of what the Lord is teaching, we may need to explain them to them many times. May the Lord richly bless you as you continue to explain various lessons to help your children understand.