***Gospel Breakout***

**Summer 2021, Acts 11:19-30 September 19, 2021**

***Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection to Stephen  
traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to the Jews.  
Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch  
and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.  
The Lord’s hand was upon them, and a great number of people believed  
and turned to the Lord..*Acts 11:19-21**

**Introduction: A short history of breakouts (and what stalls them)**

**The gospel arrives in Antioch (base camp for the breakout)**

19 *Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. 20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*

Acts 11:19-21

1. We are taken back to Acts 8:1: “On that day a great persecution broke out . . . .”

2. These men from Cyprus and Cyrene probably hadn’t heard the stories of Acts 9-10

3. The Holy Spirit is at work, but “the Lord” is at the center of everything!

**A better plan: Send Barnabas**

22 *News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.  
23 When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.*

Acts 11:22-24

1. The “mother church” this time shows no concern, hesitation or criticism – lessons learned!

2. Barnabas is still encouraging (see 6:36, 9:27) – but he isn’t a prophet, evangelist or apostle

**Barnabas knows Rule 5**

25 *Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*

Acts 11:25-26

1. Barnabas knows his limitations, and he recognizes the gifts of Saul of Tarsus (note the order!)

2. The plan: they *sun + agō* for a whole year because the church is already here

3. In a city that is dedicated to “Caesar’ians”, Antioch, is now the center of the mission of the church

**Remember Jerusalem!**

27 *During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) 29 The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. 30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.*

Acts 11:27-30 (this relates to the history of Acts 12 and Galatians 1-2)

1. The Ephesian 4:11-16 church is already at work

2. There is one church – and they are already bearing one another’s burdens

**Beachhead to breakout in on the islands**

1) the church needs both encouragers and teachers (750 tons a day and a plan for Operation Cobra)

25 *Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch . . . .*

Acts 11:25

2) Those leading the breakout are not from Jerusalem – this is about how Anacortes reaches Anacortes

11 *Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—   
12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.*

Ephesians 2:11-20

Map

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**Resources for further studies in Acts**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on Acts at [*https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg*](https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg)

Spurgeon has fewer sermons on Acts available than I would hope at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r\_ac.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r_ac.htm) *.* His “Repentance Unto Life” sermon on this text is at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0044.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0044.htm)

I really appreciate J.C. Ryle’s essay on conversion in Acts: *https://www.monergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*[*https://www.onergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*](https://www.onergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle)

Alexander Maclaren has an especially helpful commentary on Acts available at [*https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html*](https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html)

Deffinbaugh has a helpful introduction at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts*](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts )  
His Acts series is at [*https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts*](https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts)His sermons on this text are at   
[*https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048*G](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048G) and   
[*https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130*](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130)

George Whitefield has a sermon on Saul’s conversion at [*https://www.monergism.com/sauls-conversion*](https://www.monergism.com/sauls-conversion)

I have really appreciated John Stott’s *The Spirit, The Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) and F. F. Bruce’s work: *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1980) and *The Book of the Acts* (Eerdmans, 1984). For this passage, I also like Kistemaker’s commentary (Baker Book House, 1990).

Harry Boer, *That My House May Be Filled* (Eerdmans, 1957)

Carl Trueman has a good analysis of the world’s opposition in his recent essay “Dogma Drives the Christian Life” at [*https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/08/dogma-drives-the-christian-life*](https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/08/dogma-drives-the-christian-life)

Carl Trueman’s conclusion in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway, 2020) influenced my thinking on the church. His third point, the importance of proper natural law thinking, is reflected in Kevin DeYoung’s blog at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/)

# Acts Timeline (ESV Study Bible)

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### Alexander Maclaren’s commentary on Acts: at [*https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html*](https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html)

### THE FIRST PREACHING AT ANTIOCH

'And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they ware come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.'—ACTS xi. 20, 21.

Thus simply does the historian tell one of the greatest events in the history of the Church. How great it was will appear if we observe that the weight of authority among critics and commentators sees here an extension of the message of salvation to Greeks, that is, to pure heathens, and not a mere preaching to Hellenists, that is, to Greek-speaking Jews born outside Palestine.

If that be correct, this was a great stride forward in the development of the Church. It needed a vision to overcome the scruples of Peter, and impel him to the bold innovation of preaching to Cornelius and his household, and, as we know, his doing so gave grave offence to some of his brethren in Jerusalem. But in the case before us, some Cypriote and African Jews—men of no note in the Church, whose very names have perished, with no official among them, with no vision nor command to impel them, with no precedent to encourage them, with nothing but the truth in their minds and the impulses of Christ's love in their hearts—solve the problem of the extension of Christ's message to the heathen, and, quite unconscious of the greatness of their act, do the thing about the propriety of which there had been such serious question in Jerusalem.

This boldness becomes even more remarkable if we notice that the incident of our text may have taken place before Peter's visit to Cornelius. The verse before our text, 'They which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled, … preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only,' is almost a *verbatim* repetition of words in an earlier chapter, and evidently suggests that the writer is returning to that point of time, in order to take up another thread of his narrative contemporaneous with those already pursued. If so, three distinct lines of expansion appear to have started from the dispersion of the Jerusalem church in the persecution—namely, Philip's mission to Samaria, Peter's to Cornelius, and this work in Antioch. Whether prior in time or no, the preaching in the latter city was plainly quite independent of the other two. It is further noteworthy that this, the effort of a handful of unnamed men, was the true 'leader'—the shoot that grew. Philip's work, and Peter's so far as we know, were side branches, which came to little; this led on to a church at Antioch, and so to Paul's missionary work, and all that came of that.

The incident naturally suggests some thoughts bearing on the general subject of Christian work, which we now briefly present.

I. Notice the spontaneous impulse which these men obeyed.

Persecution drove the members of the Church apart, and, as a matter of course, wherever they went they took their faith with them, and, as a matter of course, spoke about it. The coals were scattered from the hearth in Jerusalem by the armed heel of violence. That did not put the fire out, but only spread it, for wherever they were flung they kindled a blaze. These men had no special injunction 'to preach the Lord Jesus.' They do not seem to have adopted this line of action deliberately, or of set purpose. 'They believed, and therefore spoke.' A spontaneous impulse, and nothing more, leads them on. They find themselves rejoicing in a great Saviour-Friend. They see all around them men who need Him, and that is enough. They obey the promptings of the voice within, and lay the foundations of the first Gentile Church.

Such a spontaneous impulse is ever the natural result of our own personal possession of Christ. In regard to worldly good the instinct, except when overcome by higher motives, is to keep the treasure to oneself. But even in the natural sphere there are possessions which to have is to long to impart, such as truth and knowledge. And in the spiritual sphere, it is emphatically the case that real possession is always accompanied by a longing to impart. The old prophet spoke a universal truth when he said: 'Thy word was as a fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.' If we have found Christ for ourselves, we shall undoubtedly wish to speak forth our knowledge of His love. Convictions which are deep demand expression. Emotion which is strong needs utterance. If our hearts have any fervour of love to Christ in them, it will be as natural to tell it forth, as tears are to sorrow or smiles to happiness. True, there is a reticence in profound feeling, and sometimes the deepest love can only 'love and be silent,' and there is a just suspicion of loud or vehement protestations of Christian emotion, as of any emotion. But for all that, it remains true that a heart warmed with the love of Christ needs to express its love, and will give it forth, as certainly as light must radiate from its centre, or heat from a fire.

Then, true kindliness of heart creates the same impulse. We cannot truly possess the treasure for ourselves without pity for those who have it not. Surely there is no stranger contradiction than that Christian men and women can be content to keep Christ as if He were their special property, and have their spirits untouched into any likeness of His divine pity for the multitudes who were as 'sheep having no shepherd.' What kind of Christians must they be who think of Christ as 'a Saviour for me,' and take no care to set Him forth as 'a Saviour for you'? What should we think of men in a shipwreck who were content to get into the lifeboat, and let everybody else drown? What should we think of people in a famine feasting sumptuously on their private stores, whilst women were boiling their children for a meal and men fighting with dogs for garbage on the dunghills? 'He that withholdeth bread, the people shall curse him.' What of him who withholds the Bread of Life, and all the while claims to be a follower of the Christ, who gave His flesh for the life of the world?

Further, loyalty to Christ creates the same impulse. If we are true to our Lord, we shall feel that we cannot but speak up and out for Him, and that all the more where His name is unloved and unhonoured. He has left His good fame very much in our hands, and the very same impulse which hurries words to our lips when we hear the name of an absent friend calumniated should make us speak for Him. He is a doubtfully loyal subject who, if he lives among rebels, is afraid to show his colours. He is already a coward, and is on the way to be a traitor. Our Master has made us His witnesses. He has placed in our hands, as a sacred deposit, the honour of His name. He has entrusted to us, as His selectest sign of confidence, the carrying out of the purposes for which on earth His blood was shed, on which in heaven His heart is set. How can we be loyal to Him if we are not forced by a mighty constraint to respond to His great tokens of trust in us, and if we know nothing of that spirit which said: 'Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!' I do not say that a man cannot be a Christian unless he knows and obeys this impulse. But, at least, we may safely say that he is a very weak and imperfect Christian who does not.

II. This incident suggests the universal obligation on all Christians to make known Christ.

These men were not officials. In these early days the Church had a very loose organisation. But the fugitives in our narrative seem to have had among them none even of the humble office-bearers of primitive times. Neither had they any command or commission from Jerusalem. No one there had given them authority, or, as would appear, knew anything of their proceedings. Could there be a more striking illustration of the great truth that whatever varieties of function may be committed to various officers in the Church, the work of telling Christ's love to men belongs to every one who has found it for himself or herself? 'This honour have all the saints.'

Whatever may be our differences of opinion as to Church order and offices, they need not interfere with our firm grasp of this truth. 'Preaching Christ,' in the sense in which that expression is used in the New Testament, implies no one special method of proclaiming the glad tidings. A word written in a letter to a friend, a sentence dropped in casual conversation, a lesson to a child on a mother's lap, or any other way by which, to any listeners, the great story of the Cross is told, is as truly—often more truly—preaching Christ as the set discourse which has usurped the name.

We profess to believe in the priesthood of all believers, we are ready enough to assert it in opposition to sacerdotal assumptions. Are we as ready to recognise it as laying a very real responsibility upon us, and involving a very practical inference as to our own conduct? We all have the power, therefore we all have the duty. For what purpose did God give us the blessing of knowing Christ ourselves? Not for our own well-being alone, but that through us the blessing might be still further diffused.

  'Heaven doth with us as men with torches do,  
    Not light them for themselves.'

'God hath shined into our hearts' that we might give to others 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Every Christian is solemnly bound to fulfil this divine intention, and to take heed to the imperative command, 'Freely ye have received, freely give.'

III. Observe, further, the simple message which they proclaimed.

'Preaching the Lord Jesus,' says the text—or more accurately perhaps—'preaching Jesus as Lord.' The substance, then, of their message was just this—proclamation of the person and dignity of their Master, the story of the human life of the Man, the story of the divine sacrifice and self-bestowment by which He had bought the right of supreme rule over every heart; and the urging of His claims on all who heard of His love. And this, their message, was but the proclamation of their own personal experience. They had found Jesus to be for themselves Lover and Lord, Friend and Saviour of their souls, and the joy they had received they sought to share with these Greeks, worshippers of gods and lords many.

Surely anybody can deliver that message who has had that experience. All have not the gifts which would fit for public speech, but all who have 'tasted that the Lord is gracious' can somehow tell how gracious He is. The first Christian sermon was very short, and it was very efficacious, for it 'brought to Jesus' the whole congregation. Here it is: 'He first findeth his brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias.' Surely we can all say that, if we have found Him. Surely we shall all long to say it, if we are glad that we have found Him, and if we love our brother.

Notice, too, how simple the form as well as the substance of the message. 'They *spake*.' It was no set address, no formal utterance, but familiar, natural talk to ones and twos, as opportunity offered. The form was so simple that we may say that there was none. What we want is that Christian people should speak anyhow. What does the shape of the cup matter? What does it matter whether it be gold or clay? The main thing is that it shall bear the water of life to some thirsty lip. All Christians have to preach, as the word is used here, that is, to tell the good news. Their task is to carry a message—no refinement of words is needed for that—arguments are not needed. They have to tell it simply and faithfully, as one who only cares to repeat what he has had given to him. They have to tell it confidently, as having proved it true. They have to tell it beseechingly, as loving the souls to whom they bring it. Surely we can all do that, if we ourselves are living on Christ and have drunk into His Spirit. Let His mighty salvation, experienced by yourselves, be the substance of your message, and let the form of it be guided by the old words, 'It shall be, when the Spirit of the Lord is come upon thee, that thou shalt do as occasion shall serve thee.'

IV. Notice, lastly, the mighty Helper who prospered their work.

'The hand of the Lord was with them.' The very keynote of this Book of the Acts is the work of the ascended Christ in and for His Church. At every turning-point in the history, and throughout the whole narratives, forms of speech like this occur, bearing witness to the profound conviction of the writer that Christ's active energy was with His servants, and Christ's Hand the origin of all their security and of all their success.

So this is a statement of a permanent and universal fact. We do not labour alone; however feeble our hands, that mighty Hand is laid on them to direct their movements and to lend strength to their weakness. It is not our speech which will secure results, but His presence with our words which will bring it about that even through them a great number shall believe and turn to the Lord. There is our encouragement when we are despondent. There is our rebuke when we are self-confident. There is our stimulus when we are indolent. There is our quietness when we are impatient. If ever we are tempted to think our task heavy, let us not forget that He who set it helps us to do it, and from His throne shares in all our toils, the Lord still, as of old, working with us. If ever we feel that our strength is nothing, and that we stand solitary against many foes, let us fall back upon the peace-giving thought that one man against the world, with Christ to help him, is always in the majority, and let us leave issues of our work in His hands, whose hand will guard the seed sown in weakness, whose smile will bless the springing thereof.

How little any of us know what will become of our poor work, under His fostering care! How little these men knew that they were laying the foundations of the great change which was to transform the Christian community from a Jewish sect into a world-embracing Church! So is it ever. We know not what we do when simply and humbly we speak His name. The far-reaching results escape our eyes. Then, sow the seed, and He will 'give it a body as it pleaseth Him.' On earth we may never know the fruits of our labours. They will be among the surprises of heaven, where many a solitary worker shall exclaim with wonder, as he looks on the hitherto unknown children whom God hath given him, 'Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?' Then, though our names may have perished from earthly memories, like those of the simple fugitives of Cyprus and Cyrene, who 'were the first that ever burst' into the night of heathendom with the torch of the Gospel in their hands, they will be written in the Lamb's book of life, and He will confess them in the presence of His Father in heaven.

THE EXHORTATION OF BARNABAS [Footnote: Preached before the  
Congregational Union of England and Wales.]

'Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.'—ACTS xi. 23.

The first purely heathen converts had been brought into the Church by the nameless men of Cyprus and Cyrene, private persons with no office or commission to preach, who, in simple obedience to the instincts of a Christian heart, leaped the barrier which seemed impassable to the Church in Jerusalem, and solved the problem over which Apostles were hesitating. Barnabas is sent down to see into this surprising new phenomenon, and his mission, though probably not hostile, was, at all events, one of inquiry and doubt. But like a true man, he yielded to facts, and widened his theory to suit them. He saw the tokens of Christian life in these Gentile converts, and that compelled him to admit that the Church was wider than some of his friends in Jerusalem thought. A pregnant lesson for modern theorists who, on one ground or another of doctrine or of orders, narrow the great conception of Christ's Church! Can you see 'the grace of God' in the people? Then they are in the Church, whatever becomes of your theories, and the sooner you let them out so as to fit the facts, the better for you and for them.

Satisfied as to their true Christian character, Barnabas sets himself to help them to grow. Now, remember how recently they had been converted; how, from their Gentile origin, they can have had next to no systematic instruction; how the taint of heathen morals, such as were common in that luxurious, corrupt Antioch, must have clung to them; how unformed must have been their loose Church organisation—and remembering all this, think of this one exhortation as summing up all that Barnabas had to say to them. He does not say, Do this, or Believe that, or Organise the other; but he says, Stick to Jesus Christ the Lord. On this commandment hangs all the law; it is the one all-inclusive summary of the duties of the Christian life.

So, brethren and fathers, I venture to take these words now, as containing large lessons for us all, appropriate at all times, and especially in a sermon on such an occasion as the present.

We may deal with the thoughts suggested by these words very simply, just looking at the points as they lie—what Barnabas *saw*, what he *felt*, what he *said*.

I. What Barnabas saw.

The grace of God here has very probably the specific meaning of the miracle-working gift of the Holy Spirit. That is rendered probable by the analogy of other instances recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, such as Peter's experience at Caesarea, where all his hesitations and reluctance were swept away when 'the Holy Ghost fell on them as on us at the beginning, and they spake with tongues.' If so, what convinced Barnabas that these uncircumcised Gentiles were Christians like himself, may have been their similar possession of the visible and audible effects of that gift of God. But the language does not compel this interpretation; and the absence of all distinct reference to these extraordinary powers as existing there, among the new converts at Antioch, may be intended to mark a difference in the nature of the evidence. At any rate, the possibly intentional generality of the expression is significant and fairly points to an extension of the spiritual gifts much beyond the limits of miraculous powers. There are other ways by which the grace of God may be seen and heard, thank God! than by speaking with tongues and working miracles; and the first lesson of our text is that wherever that grace is made visible by its appropriate manifestations, there we are to recognise a brother.

Augustine said, 'Where Christ is there is the Church,' and that is true, but vague; for the question still remains, 'And where *is* Christ?' The only satisfying answer is, Christ is wherever Christlike men manifest a life drawn from, and kindred with, His life. And so the true form of the dictum for practical purposes comes to be: 'Where the grace of Christ is visible, there is the Church.'

That great truth is sinned against and denied in many ways. Most chiefly, perhaps, by the successors in modern garb of the more Jewish portion of that Church at Jerusalem who sent Barnabas to Antioch. They had no objection to Gentiles entering the Church, but they must come in by the way of circumcision; they quite believed that it was Christ who saved, and His grace which sanctified, but they thought that His grace would only flow in a given channel; and so do their modern representatives, who exalt sacraments, and consequently priests, to the same place as the Judaizers in the early Church did the rite of the old Covenant. Such teachers have much to say about the notes of the Church, and have elaborated a complicated system of identification by which you may know the genuine article, and unmask impostors. The attempt is about as wise as to try to weave a network fine enough to keep back a stream. The water will flow through the closest meshes, and when Christ pours out the Spirit, He is apt to do it in utter disregard of notes of the Church, and of channels of sacramental grace.

We Congregationalists, who have no orders, no sacraments, no Apostolic succession; who in order not to break loose from Christ and conscience have had to break loose from 'Catholic tradition,' and have been driven to separation by the true schismatics, who have insisted on another bond of Church unity than union to Christ, are denied nowadays a place in His Church.

The true answer to all that arrogant assumption and narrow pedantry which confine the free flow of the water of life to the conduits of sacraments and orders, and will only allow the wind that bloweth where it listeth to make music in the pipes of their organs, is simply the homely one which shivered a corresponding theory to atoms in the fair open mind of Barnabas.

The Spirit of Christ at work in men's hearts, making them pure and gentle, simple and unworldly, refining their characters, elevating their aims, toning their whole being into accord with the music of His life, is the true proof that men are Christians, and that communities of such men are Churches of His. Mysterious efficacy is claimed for Christian ordinances. Well, the question is a fair one: Is the type of Christian character produced within these sacred limits, which we are hopelessly outside, conspicuously higher and more manifestly Christlike than that nourished by no sacraments, and grown not under glass, but in the unsheltered open? Has not God set His seal on these communities to which we belong? With many faults for which we have to be, and are, humble before Him, we can point to the lineaments of the family likeness, and say, 'Are they Hebrews? so are we. Are they Israelites? so are we. Are they the seed of Abraham? so are we.'

Once get that truth wrought into men's minds, that the true test of Christianity is the visible presence of a grace in character which is evidently God's, and whole mountains of prejudice and error melt away. We are just as much in danger of narrowing the Church in accordance with our narrowness as any 'sacramentarian' of them all. We are tempted to think that no good thing can grow up under the baleful shadow of that tree, a sacerdotal Christianity. We are tempted to think that all the good people are Dissenters, just as Churchmen are to think that nobody can be a Christian who prays without a prayer-book. Our own type of denominational character—and there is such a thing—comes to be accepted by us as the all but exclusive ideal of a devout man; and we have not imagination enough to conceive, nor charity enough to believe in, the goodness which does not speak our dialect, nor see with our eyes. Dogmatical narrowness has built as high walls as ceremonial Christianity has reared round the fold of Christ, And the one deliverance for us all from the transformed selfishness, which has so much to do with shaping all these wretched narrow theories of the Church, is to do as this man did—open our eyes with sympathetic eagerness to see God's grace in many an unexpected place, and square our theories with His dealings.

It used to be an axiom that there was no life in the sea beyond a certain limit of a few hundred feet. It was learnedly and conclusively demonstrated that pressure and absence of light, and I know not what beside, made life at greater depths impossible. It was proved that in such conditions creatures could not live. And then, when that was settled, the *Challenger* put down her dredge five miles, and brought up healthy and good-sized living things, with eyes in their heads, from that enormous depth. So, then, the savant had to ask, *How* can there be life? instead of asserting that there cannot be; and, no doubt, the answer will be forth coming some day.

We have all been too much accustomed to set arbitrary limits to the diffusion of the life of Christ among men. Let us rather rejoice when we see forms of beauty, which bear the mark of His hand, drawn from depths that we deemed waste, and thankfully confess that the bounds of our expectation, and the framework of our institutions, do not confine the breadth of His working, nor the sweep of His grace.

II. What Barnabas felt.

'He was glad.' It was a triumph of Christian principle to recognise the grace of God under new forms, and in so strange a place. It was a still greater triumph to hail it with rejoicing. One need not have wondered if the acknowledgment of a fact, dead in the teeth of all his prejudices, and seemingly destructive of some profound convictions, had been somewhat grudging. Even a good, true man might have been bewildered and reluctant to let go so much as was destroyed by the admission—'Then hath God granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life,'—and might have been pardoned if he had not been able to do more than acquiesce and hold his peace. We are scarcely just to these early Jewish Christians when we wonder at their hesitation on this matter, and are apt to forget the enormous strength of the prejudices and sacred conviction which they had to overcome. Hence the context seems to consider that the quick recognition of Christian character on the part of Barnabas, and his gladness at the discovery, need explanation, and so it adds, with special reference to these, as it would seem, 'for he was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith,' as if nothing short of such characteristics could have sufficiently emancipated him from the narrowness that would have refused to discern the good, or the bitterness that would have been offended at it.

So, dear brethren, we may well test ourselves with this question: Does the discovery of the working of the grace of God outside the limits of our own Churches and communions excite a quick, spontaneous emotion of gladness in *our* hearts? It may upset some of our theories; it may teach us that things which we thought very important, 'distinctive principles' and the like, are not altogether as precious as we thought them; it may require us to give up some pleasant ideas of our superiority, and of the necessary conformity of all good people to our type. Are we willing to let them all go, and without a twinge of envy or a hanging back from prejudice, to welcome the discovery that 'God fulfils Himself in many ways'? Have we schooled ourselves to say honestly, 'Therein I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice'?

There is much to overcome if we would know this Christlike gladness. The good and the bad in us may both oppose it. The natural deeper interest in the well-being of the Churches of our own faith and order, the legitimate ties which unite us with these, our conscientious convictions, our friendships, the *esprit de corps* born of fighting shoulder to shoulder, will, of course, make our sympathies flow most quickly and deeply in denominational channels. And then come in abundance of less worthy motives, some altogether bad and some the exaggeration of what is good, and we get swallowed up in our own individual work, or in that of our 'denomination,' and have but a very tepid joy in anybody else's prosperity.

In almost every town of England, your Churches, and those to which I belong, with Presbyterians and Wesleyans, stand side by side. The conditions of our work make some rivalry inevitable, and none of us, I suppose, object to that. It helps to keep us all diligent: a sturdy adherence to our several 'distinctive principles' and an occasional hard blow in fair fight on their behalf we shall all insist upon. Our brotherhood is all the more real for frank speech, and 'the animated No!' is an essential in all intercourse which is not stagnant or mawkish. There is much true fellowship and much good feeling among all these. But we want far more of an honest rejoicing in each other's success, a quicker and truer manly sympathy with each other's work, a fuller consciousness of our solidarity in Christ, and a clearer exhibition of it before the world.

And on a wider view, as our eyes travel over the wide field of Christendom, and our memories go back over the long ages of the story of the Church, let gladness, and not wonder or reluctance, be the temper with which we see the graces of Christian character lifting their meek blossoms in corners strange to us, and breathing their fragrance over the pastures of the wilderness. In many a cloister, in many a hermit's cell, from amidst the smoke of incense, through the dust of controversies, we should see, and be glad to see, faces bright with the radiance caught from Christ. Let us set a jealous watch over our hearts that self-absorption, or denominationalism, or envy do not make the sight a pain instead of a joy; and let us remember that the eye-salve which will purge our dim sight to behold the grace of God in all its forms is that grace itself, which ever recognises its own kindred, and lives in the gladness of charity, and the joy of beholding a brother's good. If we are to have eyes to know the grace of God when we see it, and a heart to rejoice when we know it, we must get them as Barnabas got his, and be good men, because we are full of the Holy Ghost, and full of the Holy Ghost because we are full of faith.

III. What Barnabas said.

'He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.' The first thing that strikes one about this all-sufficient directory for Christian life is the emphasis with which it sets forth 'the Lord' as the one object to be grasped and held. The sum of all objective Religion is Christ—the sum of all subjective Religion is cleaving to Him. A living Person to be laid hold of, and a personal relation to that Person, such is the conception of Religion, whether considered as revelation or as inward life, which underlies this exhortation. Whether we listen to His own words about Himself, and mark the altogether unprecedented way in which He was His own theme, and the unique decisiveness and plainness with which He puts His own personality before us as the Incarnate Truth, the pattern for all human conduct, the refuge and the rest for the world of weary ones; or whether we give ear to the teaching of His Apostles; from whatever point of view we approach Christianity, it all resolves itself into the person of Jesus Christ. He is the *Revelation* of God; theology, properly so called, is but the formulating of the facts which He gives us; and for the modern world the alternative is, Christ the manifested God, or no God at all, other than the shadow of a name. He is the perfect *Exemplar* of humanity! The law of life and the power to fulfil the law are both in Him; and the superiority of Christian morality consists not in this or that isolated precept, but in the embodiment of all goodness in His life, and in the new motive which He supplies for keeping the commandment. Wrenched away from Him, Christian morality has no being. He is the sacrifice for the world, the salvation of which flows from what He does, and not merely from what He taught or was. His personality is the foundation of His work, and the gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation is all contained in the name of Jesus.

There is a constant tendency to separate the results of Christ's life and death, whether considered as revelation, atonement, or ethics, from Him, and unconsciously to make these the sum of our Religion, and the object of our faith. Especially is this the case in times of restless thought and eager canvassing of the very foundations of religious belief, like the present. Therefore it is wholesome for us all to be brought back to the pregnant simplicity of the thought which underlies this text, and to mark how vividly these early Christians apprehended a living Lord as the sum and substance of all which they had to grasp.

There is a whole world between the man to whom God's revelation consists in certain doctrines given to us by Jesus Christ, and the man to whom it consists in that Christ Himself. Grasping a living person is not the same as accepting a proposition. True, the propositions are about Him, and we do not know Him without them. But equally true, we need to be reminded that *He* is our Saviour and not *they*, and that God has revealed Himself to us not in words and sentences but in a life.

For, alas! the doctrinal element has overborne the personal among all Churches and all schools of thought, and in the necessary process of formulating and systematising the riches which are in Jesus, we are all apt to confound the creeds with the Christ, and so to manipulate Christianity until, instead of being the revelation of a Person and a gospel, it has become a system of divinity. Simple, devout souls have to complain that they cannot find even a dead Christ, to say nothing of a living one, for the theologians have 'taken away their Lord, and they know not where they have laid Him.'

It is, therefore, to be reckoned as a distinct gain that one result of the course of more recent thought, both among friends and foes, has been to make all men feel more than before, that all revelation is contained in the living person of Jesus Christ. So did the Church believe before creeds were. So it is coming to feel again, with a consciousness enriched and defined by the whole body of doctrine, which has flowed from Him during all the ages. That solemn, gracious Figure rises day by day more clearly before men, whether they love Him or no, as the vital centre of this great whole of doctrines, laws, institutions, which we call Christianity. Round the story of His life the final struggle is to be waged. The foe feels that, so long as that remains, all other victories count for nothing. We feel that if that goes, there is nothing to keep. The principles and the precepts will perish alike, as the fair palace of the old legend, that crumbled to dust when its builder died. But so long as He stands before mankind as He is painted in the Gospel, it will endure. If all else were annihilated, Churches, creeds and all, leave us these four Gospels, and all else would be evolved again. The world knows now, and the Church has always known, though it has not always been true to the significance of the fact, that Jesus Christ is Christianity, and that because He lives, it will live also.

And consequently the sum of all personal religion is this simple act described here as *cleaving to Him*.

Need I do more than refer to the rich variety of symbols and forms of expression under which that thought is put alike by the Master and by His servants? Deepest of all are His own great words, of which our text is but a feeble echo, 'Abide in Me, and I in you.' Fairest of all is that lovely emblem of the vine, setting forth the sweet mystery of our union with Him. Far as it is from the outmost pliant tendril to the root, one life passes to the very extremities, and every cluster swells and reddens and mellows because of its mysterious flow. 'So also is Christ.' We remember how often the invitation flowed from His lips, *Come* unto Me; how He was wont to beckon men away from self and the world with the great command, *Follow* Me; how He explained the secret of all true life to consist in *eating* Him. We may recall, too, the emphasis and perpetual reiteration with which Paul speaks of being 'in Jesus' as the condition of all blessedness, power, and righteousness; and the emblems which he so often employs of the building bound into a whole on the foundation from which it derives its stability, of the body compacted and organised into a whole by the head from which it derives its life.

We begin to be Christians, as this context tells us, when we 'turn to the Lord.' We continue to be Christians, as Barnabas reminded these ignorant beginners, by 'cleaving to the Lord.' Seeing, then, that our great task is to preserve that which we have as the very foundation of our Christian life, clearly the truest method of so keeping it will be the constant repetition of the act by which we got it at first. In other words, faith joined us to Christ, and continuously reiterated acts of faith keep us united to Him. So, if I may venture, fathers and brethren, to cast my words into the form of exhortation, even to such an audience as the present, I would earnestly say, Let us cleave to Christ by continual renewal of our first faith in Him.

The longest line may be conceived of as produced simply by the motion of its initial point. So should our lives be, our progress not consisting in leaving our early acts of faith behind us, but in repeating them over and over again till the points coalesce in one unbroken line which goes straight to the Throne and Heart of Jesus. True, the repetition should be accompanied with fuller knowledge, with calmer certitude, and should come from a heart ennobled and encircled by a Christ-possessing past. As in some great symphony the theme which was given out in low notes on one poor instrument recurs over and over again, embroidered with varying harmonies, and unfolding a richer music, till it swells into all the grandeur of the triumphant close, so our lives should be bound into a unity, and in their unity bound to Christ by the constant renewal of our early faith, and the fathers should come round again to the place which they occupied when as children they first knew Him that is 'from the beginning' to the end one and the same.

Such constant reiteration is needed, too, because yesterday's trust has no more power to secure to-day's union than the shreds of cloth and nails which hold last year's growth to the wall will fasten this year's shoots. Each moment must be united to Christ by its own act of faith, or it will be separated from Him. So living in the Lord we shall be strong and wise, happy and holy. So dying in the Lord we shall be of the dead who are blessed. So sleeping in Jesus we shall at the last be found in Him at that day, and shall be raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

But more specially let us cleave to Christ by habitual contemplation. There can be no real continuous closeness of intercourse with Him, except by thought ever recurring to Him amidst all the tumult of our busy days. I do not mean professional thinking or controversial thinking, of which we ministers have more than enough. There is another mood of mind in which to approach our Lord than these, a mood sadly unfamiliar, I am afraid, in these days: when poor Mary has hardly a chance of a reputation for 'usefulness' by the side of busy, bustling Martha—that still contemplation of the truth which we possess, not with the view of discovering its foundations, or investigating its applications, or even of increasing our knowledge of its contents, but of bringing our own souls more completely under its influence, and saturating our being with its fragrance. The Church has forgotten how to meditate. We are all so occupied arguing and deducing and elaborating, that we have no time for retired, still contemplation, and therefore lose the finest aroma of the truth we profess to believe. Many of us are so busy thinking about Christianity that we have lost our hold of Christ. Sure I am that there are few things more needed by our modern religion than the old exhortation, 'Come, My people, enter into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee.' Cleave to the Lord by habitual play of meditative thought on the treasures hidden in His name, and waiting like gold in the quartz, to be the prize of our patient sifting and close gaze.

And when the great truths embodied in Him stand clear before us, then let us remember that we have not done with them when we have *seen* them. Next must come into exercise the moral side of faith, the voluntary act of trust, the casting ourselves on Him whom we behold, the making our own of the blessings which He holds out to us. Flee to Christ as to our strong habitation to which we may continually resort. Hold tightly by Christ with a grasp which nothing can slacken (that whitens your very knuckles as you clutch Him), lean on Christ all your weight and all your burdens. Cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart.

Let us cleave to the Lord by constant outgoings of our love to Him. That is the bond which unites human spirits together in the only real union, and Scripture teaches us to see in the sweetest, sacredest, closest tie that men and women can know, a real, though faint, shadow of the far deeper and truer union between Christ and us. The same love which is the bond of perfectness between man and man, is the bond between us and Christ. In no dreamy, semi-pantheistic fusion of the believer with his Lord do we find the true conception of the unity of Christ and His Church, but in a union which preserves the individualities lest it should slay the love. Faith knits us to Christ, and faith is the mother of love, which maintains the blessed union. So let us not be ashamed of the *emotional* side of our religion, nor deem that we can cleave to Christ unless our hearts twine their tendrils round Him, and our love pours its odorous treasures on His sacred feet, not without weeping and embraces. Cold natures may carp, but Love is justified of her children, and Christ accepts the homage that has a heart in it. Cleaving to the Lord is not merely love, but it is impossible without it. The order is Faith, Love, Obedience—that threefold cord knits men to Christ, and Christ to men. For the understanding, a continuous grasp of Him as the object of thought. For the heart, a continuous outgoing to Him as the object of our love. For the will, a continuous submission to Him as the Lord of our obedience. For the whole nature, a continuous cleaving to Him as the object of our faith and worship.

Such is the true discipline of the Christian life. Such is the all-sufficient command; as for the newest convert from heathenism, with little knowledge and the taint of his old vices in his soul, so for the saint fullest of wisdom and nearest the Light.

It *is* all-sufficient. If Barnabas had been like some of us, he would have had a very different style of exhortation. He would have said, 'This irregular work has been well done, but there are no authorised teachers here, and no provision has been made for the due administration of the sacraments of the Church. The very first thing of all is to give these people the blessing of bishops and priests.' Some of us would have said, 'Valuable work has been done, but these good people are terribly ignorant. The best thing would be to get ready as soon as possible some manual of Christian doctrine, and in the meantime provide for their systematic instruction in at least the elements of the faith.' Some of us would have said, 'No doubt they have been converted, but we fear there has been too much of the emotional in the preaching. The moral side of Christianity has not been pressed home, and what they chiefly need is to be taught that it is not feeling, but righteousness. Plain, practical instruction in Christian duty is the one thing they want.'

Barnabas knew better. He did not despise organisation, nor orthodoxy, nor practical righteousness, but he knew that all three, and everything else that any man needed for his perfecting would come, if only the converts kept near to Christ, and that nothing else was of any use if they did not. That same conviction should for us settle the relative importance which we attach to these subordinate and derivative things, and to the primary and primitive duty. Obedience to it will secure them. They, without it, are not worth securing.

We spend much pains and effort nowadays in perfecting our organisations and consolidating our resources, and I have not a word to say against that. But heavier machinery needs more power in the engine, and that means greater capacity in your boilers and more fire in your furnace. The more complete our organisation, the more do we need a firm hold of Christ, or we shall be overweighted by it, shall be in danger of burning incense to our own net, shall be tempted to trust in drill rather than in courage, in mechanism rather than in the life drawn from Christ. On the other hand, if we put as our first care the preservation of the closeness of our union with Christ, that life will shape a body for itself, and 'to every seed its own body.'

True conceptions of Him, and a definite theology, are good and needful. Let us cleave to Him with mind and heart, and we shall receive all the knowledge we need, and be guided into the deep things of God. In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and the basis of all theology is the personal possession of Him who is 'the wisdom of God' and 'the Light of the world.' Every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. *Pectus facit Theologum*.

Plain, straightforward morality and everyday righteousness are better than all emotion and all dogmatism and all churchism, says the world, and Christianity says much the same; but plain, straightforward righteousness and everyday morality come most surely when a man is keeping close to Christ. In a word, everything that can adorn the character with beauty, and clothe the Church with glorious apparel, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, all that the world or God calls virtue and crowns with praise, they are all in their fulness in Him, and all are most surely derived from Him by keeping fast hold of His hand, and preserving the channels clear through which His manifold grace may flow into our souls. The same life is strength in the arm, pliancy in the fingers, swiftness in the foot, light in the eye, music on the lips; so the same grace is Protean in its forms, and to His servants who trust Him Christ ever says, 'What would ye that I should do unto you? Be it even as thou wilt.' The same mysterious power lives in the swaying branch, and in the veined leaf, and in the blushing clusters. With like wondrous transformations of the one grace, the Lord pours Himself into our spirits, filling all needs and fitting for all circumstances. Therefore for us all, individuals and Churches, this remains the prime command, 'With purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord.' Dear brethren in the ministry, how sorely we need this exhortation! Our very professional occupation with Christ and His truth is full of danger for us; we are so accustomed to handle these sacred themes as a means of instructing or impressing others that we get to regard them as our weapons, even if we do not degrade them still further by thinking of them as our stock-in-trade and means of oratorical effect. We must keep very firm hold of Christ for ourselves by much solitary communion, and so retranslating into the nutriment of our own souls the message we bring to men, else when we have preached to others we ourselves may be cast away. All the ordinary tendencies which draw men from Him work on us, and a host of others peculiar to ourselves, and all around us run strong currents of thought which threaten to sweep many away. Let us tighten our grasp of Him in the face of modern doubt; and take heed to ourselves that neither vanity, nor worldliness, nor sloth; neither the gravitation earthward common to all, nor the temptations proper to our office; neither unbelieving voices without nor voices within, seduce us from His side. There only is our peace, there our wisdom, there our power.

Subtly and silently the separating forces are ever at work upon us, and all unconsciously to ourselves our hold may relax, and the flow of this grace into our spirits may cease, while yet we mechanically keep up the round of outward service, nor even suspect that our strength is departed from us. Many a stately elm that seems full of vigorous life, for all its spreading boughs and clouds of dancing leaves, is hollow at the heart, and when the storm comes goes down with a crash, and men wonder, as they look at the ruin, how such a mere shell of life with a core of corruption could stand so long. It rotted within, and fell at last, because its roots did not go deep down to the rich soil, where they would have found nourishment, but ran along near the surface among gravel and stones. If we would stand firm, be sound within, and bring forth much fruit, we must strike our roots deep in Him who is the anchorage of our souls, and the nourisher of all our being.

Hearken, beloved brethren, in this great work of the ministry, not to the exhortation of the servant, but to the solemn command of the Master, 'Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.' And let us, knowing our own weakness, take heed of the self-confidence that answers, 'Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I,' and turn the vows which spring to our lips into the lowly prayer, 'My soul cleaveth unto the dust, quicken Thou me according to Thy word.' Then, thinking rather of His cleaving to us than of our cleaving to Him, let us resolutely take as the motto of our lives the grand words: 'I follow after, if that I may lay hold of that for which I am also laid hold of by Christ Jesus!'

### WHAT A GOOD MAN IS, AND HOW HE BECOMES SO

'He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.'—ACTS xi, 24.

'A good man.' How easily that title is often gained! There is, perhaps, no clearer proof that men are bad than the sort of people whom they consent to call good.

It is a common observation that all words describing moral excellence tend to deteriorate and to contract their meaning, just as bright metal rusts by exposure, or coins become light and illegible by use. So it comes to pass that any decently respectable man, especially if he has an easy temper and a dash of frankness and good humour, is christened with this title 'good.' The Bible, which is the verdict of the Judge, is a great deal more chary in its use of the word. You remember how Jesus Christ once rebuked a man for addressing Him so, not that He repudiated the title, but that the giver had bestowed it lightly and out of mere conventional politeness. The word is too noble to be applied without very good reason.

But here we have a picture of Barnabas hung in the gallery of Scripture portraits, and this is the description of it in the catalogue, 'He was a good man.'

You observe that my text is in the nature of an analysis. It begins at the outside, and works inwards. 'He was a good man.' Indeed;—how came he to be so? He was 'full of the Holy Ghost.' Full of the Holy Ghost, was he? How came he to be that? He was 'full of faith.' So the writer digs down, as it were, till he gets to the bed-rock, on which all the higher strata repose; and here is his account of the way in which it is possible for human nature to win this resplendent title, and to be adjudged of God as 'good,' 'full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.'

So these three steps in the exposition of the character and its secret will afford a framework for what I have to say now.

I. Note, then, first, the sort of man whom the Judge will call 'good.'

Now, I suppose I need not spend much time in massing together, in brief outline, the characteristics of Barnabas. He was a Levite, belonging to the sacerdotal tribe, and perhaps having some slight connection with the functions of the Temple ministry. He was not a resident in the Holy Land, but a Hellenistic Jew, a native of Cyprus, who had come into contact with heathenism in a way that had beaten many a prejudice out of him. We first hear of him as taking a share in the self-sacrificing burst of brotherly love, which, whether it was wise or not, was noble. 'He, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the Apostles' feet.' And, as would appear from a reference in one of Paul's letters, he had to support himself afterwards by manual labour.

Then the next thing that we hear of him is that, when the young man who had been a persecuting Pharisee, and the rising hope of the anti-Christian party, all at once came forward with some story of a vision which he had seen on the road to Damascus, and when the older Christians were suspicious of a trick to worm himself into their secrets by a pretended conversion, Barnabas, with the generosity of an unsuspicious nature, which often sees deeper into men than do suspicious eyes, was the first to cast the aegis of his recognition round him. In like manner, when Christianity took an entirely spontaneous and, to the Church at Jerusalem, rather unwelcome new development and expansion, when some unofficial believers, without any authority from headquarters, took upon themselves to stride clean across the wall of separation, and to speak of Jesus Christ to blank heathens, and found, to the not altogether gratified surprise of the Christians at Jerusalem, 'that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost,' it was Barnabas who was sent down to look into this surprising new phenomenon, and we read that 'when he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad.' The reason why he rejoiced over the manifestation of the grace of God in such a strange form was because 'he was a good man,' and his goodness recognised goodness in others and was glad at the work of the Lord. The new condition of affairs sent him to look for Paul, and to put him to work. Then we find him set apart to missionary service, and the leader of the first missionary band, in which he was accompanied by his friend Saul. He acquiesced frankly, and without a murmur, in the superiority of the junior, and yielded up pre-eminence to him quite willingly. The story of that missionary journey begins 'Barnabas and Saul,' but very soon it comes to be 'Paul and Barnabas,' and it keeps that order throughout. He was an older man than Paul, for when at Lystra the people thought that the gods had come down in the likeness of men; Barnabas was Jupiter, and Paul the quick-footed Mercury, messenger of the gods. He was in the work before Paul was thought of, and it must have taken a great deal of goodness to acquiesce in 'He must increase and I must decrease.' Then came the quarrel between them, the foolish fondness for his runaway nephew John Mark, whom he insisted on retaining in a place for which he was conspicuously unfitted. And so he lost his friend, the confidence of the Church, and his work. He sulked away into Cyprus; he had his nephew, for whom he had given up all these other things. A little fault may wreck a life, and the whiter the character the blacker the smallest stain upon it.

We do not hear anything more of him. Apparently, from one casual allusion, he continued to serve the Lord in evangelistic work, but the sweet communion of the earlier days, and the confident friendship with the Apostle, seem to have come to an end with that sharp contention. So Barnabas drops out of the rank of Christian workers. And yet 'he was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.'

Now I have spent more time than I meant over this brief outline of the sort of character here pointed at. Let me just gather into one or two sentences what seem to me to be the lessons of it. The first is this, that the tap-root of all goodness is reference to God and obedience to Him. People tell us that morality is independent of religion. I admit that many men are better than their creeds, and many men are worse than their creeds; but I would also venture to assert that morality is the garment of religion; the body of which religion is the soul; the expression of religion in daily life. And although I am not going to say that nothing which a man does without reference to God has any comparative goodness in it, or that all the acts which are thus void of reference to Him stand upon one level of evil, I do venture to say that the noblest deed, which is not done in conscious obedience to the will of God, lacks its supreme nobleness. The loftiest perfection of conduct is obedience to God. And whatever excellence of self-sacrifice, 'whatsoever things lovely and of good report,' there may be, apart from the presence of this perfect motive, those deeds are imperfect. They do not correspond either to the whole obligations or to the whole possibilities of man, and, therefore, they are beneath the level of the highest good. Good is measured by reference to God.

Then, further, let me remark that one broad feature which characterises the truest goodness is the suppression of self. That is only another way of saying the same thing as I have been saying. It is illustrated for us all through this story of Barnabas. Whosoever can say, 'I think not of myself, but of others; of the cause; of the help I can give to men; and I lay not goods only, nor prejudices only, nor the pride of position and the supremacy of place only at the feet of God, but I lay down my whole self; and I desire that self may be crucified, that God may live in me,'—he, and only he, has reached the height of goodness. Goodness requires the suppression of self.

Further, note that the gentler traits of character are pre-eminent in Christian goodness. There is nothing about this man heroic or exceptional. His virtues are all of the meek and gracious sort—those which we relegate sometimes to an inferior place in our estimates. These things make but a poor show by the side of some of the tawdry splendours of what the vulgar world calls virtues. It requires an educated eye to see the harmony of the sober colouring of some great painter. A child, a clown, a vulgar person—and there are such in all ranks—will prefer flaring reds and blues and yellows heaped together in staring contrast. A thrush or a blackbird is but a soberly clad creature by the side of macaws and paroquets; but the one has a song and the others have only a screech. The gentle virtues are the truly Christian virtues—patience and meekness and long-suffering and sympathy and readiness to efface oneself for the sake of God and of men.

So there is a bit of comfort for us commonplace, humdrum people, to whom God has only given one or two talents, and who can never expect to make a figure before men. We may be little violets below a stone, if we cannot be flaunting hollyhocks and tiger lilies. We may have the beauty of goodness in us after Christ's example, and that is better than to be great.

Barnabas was no genius. He was not even a genius in goodness; he did not strike out anything original and out of the way. He seems to have been a commonplace kind of man enough; but 'he was a good man.' And the weakest and the humblest of us may hope to have the same thing said of us, if we will.

And then, note further, that true goodness, thank God! does not exclude the possibility of falling and sinning. There is a black spot in this man's history; and there are black spots in the histories of all saints. Thank God! the Bible is, as some people would say, almost brutally frank in telling us about the imperfections of the best. Very often imperfections are the exaggerations of characteristic goodnesses, and warn us to take care that we do not push, as Barnabas did, our facility to the point of criminal complicity with weaknesses; and that we do not indulge, instead of strenuously rebuking when need is. Never let our gentleness fall away, like a badly made jelly, into a trembling heap, and never let our strength gather itself together into a repulsive attitude, but guard against the exaggeration of virtue into vice.

Remember that whilst there may be good men who sin, there is One entire and flawless, in whom all types of excellence do meet, and who alone of humanity can front the verdict of the world, and has fronted it now for nineteen centuries, with the question upon His lips, which none have dared to answer, 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?'

II. Secondly, notice the divine Helper who makes men good.

Luke, if he be the writer of the Acts, goes on with his analysis. He has done with the first fold, the outer garment, as it were; he strips it off and shows us the next fold, 'full of the Holy Ghost.'

A divine Helper, not merely a divine influence, but a divine Person, who not only helps men from without, but so enters into a man as that the man's whole nature is saturated with Him—that is strange language. Mystical and unreal I dare say some of you may think it, but let us consider whether some such divine Helper is not plainly pointed as necessary, by the experience of every man that ever honestly tried to make himself good.

I have no doubt that I am speaking to many persons who, more or less constantly and courageously and earnestly, have laboured at the task of self-improvement and self-culture. I venture to think that, if their standard of what they wish to attain is high, their confession of what they have attained will be very low. Ah, brother! if we think of what it is that we need to make us good—viz. the strengthening of these weak wills of ours, which we cannot strengthen but to a very limited degree by any tonics that we can apply, or any supports with which we may bind them round; if we consider the resistance which ourselves, our passions, our tastes, our habits, our occupations offer, and the resistance which the world around us, friends, companions, and all the aggregate, dread and formidable, of material things present to our becoming, in any lofty and comprehensive sense of the term, good men and women, I think we shall be ready to listen, as to a true Gospel, to the message that says, 'You do not need to do it by yourself.' You have got the wolf by the ears, perhaps, for a moment, but there is tremendous strength in the brute, and your hands and wrists will ache in holding him presently, and what will happen then? You do not need to try it yourself. There is a divine Helper standing at your sides and waiting to strengthen you, and that Helper does not work from outside; He will pass within, and dwell in your hearts and mould and strengthen your wills to what is good, and suppress your inclinations to evil, and, by His inward presence, teach 'your hands to war and your fingers to fight.'

Surely, surely, the experience of the world from the beginning, confirmed by the consciousness and conscience of every one of us, tells us that of ourselves we are impotent, and that the good that is within the reach of our unaided efforts is poor and fragmentary and superficial indeed.

The great promise of the Gospel is precisely this promise. We terribly limit and misunderstand what we call the Gospel if we give such exclusive predominance to one part of it, as some of us are accustomed to do. Thank God I the first word that Jesus Christ says to any soul is, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee.' But that first word has a second that follows it, 'Arise! and walk!' and it is for the sake of the second that the first is spoken. The gift of pardon, the consciousness of acceptance, the fact of reconciliation with God, the closing of the doors of the place of retribution, the quieting of the stings of accusing conscience, all these are but meant to be introductory to that which Jesus Christ Himself, in the Gospel of John, emphatically calls more than once '*the* gift of God,' which He symbolised by 'living water,' which whosoever drank should never thirst, and which whosoever possessed would give it forth in living streams of holy life and noble deeds. The promise of the Gospel is the promise of new life, derived from Christ and maintained in us by the indwelling Spirit, which will come like fresh reinforcements to an all but beaten army in some hard-fought field, which will stand like a stay behind a man, to us almost blown over by the gusts of temptation, which will strengthen what is weak, raise what is low, illumine what is dark, and will make us who are evil good with a goodness given by God through His Son.

Surely there is nothing more congruous with that divine character than that He who Himself is good, and good from Himself, should rejoice in making us, His poor children, into His own likeness. Surely He would not be good unless He delighted to make us good. Surely it is something very like presumption in men to assert that the direct communication of the Spirit of God with the spirits whom God has made is an impossibility. Surely it is flying in the face of Scripture teaching to deny that such communication is a promise. Surely it is a flagrant contradiction of the depths of Christian experience to falter in the belief that it is a very solid reality.

'Full of the Holy Ghost,' as a vessel might be to its brim of golden wine; Christian men and women! does that describe you? Full? A dribbling drop or two in the bottom of the jar. Whose fault is it? Why, with that rushing mighty wind to fill our sails if we like, should we be lying in the sickly calms of the tropics, with the pitch oozing out of the seams, and the idle canvas flapping against the mast? Why, with those tongues of fire hovering over our heads, should we be cowering over grey ashes in which there lives a little spark? Why, with that great rushing tide of the river of the water of life, should we be like the dry watercourses of the desert, with bleached and white stones baking where the stream should be running? 'O! Thou that art named the House of Israel, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings?'

III. And so, lastly, we are shown how that divine Helper comes to men.

'Full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith.' There is no goodness without the impulse and indwelling of the divine Spirit, and there is no divine Spirit to dwell in a man's heart without that man's trusting in Jesus Christ. The condition of receiving the gift that makes us good is simply and solely that we should put our trust in Jesus Christ the Giver. That opens the door, and the divine Spirit enters.

True! there are convincing operations which He effects upon the world; but these are not in question here. These come prior to, and independent of, faith. But the work of the Spirit of God, present within us to heal and hallow us, has as condition our trust in Jesus Christ, the Great Healer. If you open a chink, the water will come in. If you trust in Jesus Christ, He will give you the new life of His Spirit, which will make you free from the law of sin and death. That divine Spirit 'which they that believe in Him should receive' delights to enter into every heart where His presence is desired. Faith is desire; and desires rooted in faith cannot be in vain. Faith is expectation; and expectations based upon the divine promise can never be disappointed. Faith is dependence, and dependence that reckons upon God, and upon God's gift of His Spirit, will surely be recompensed.

The measure in which we possess the power that makes us good depends altogether upon ourselves. 'Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.' You may have as much of God as you want, and as little as you will. The measure of your faith will determine at once the measure of your goodness, and of your possession of the Spirit that makes good. Just as when the prophet miraculously increased the oil in the cruse, the golden stream flowed as long as they brought vessels, and stayed when there were no more, so as long as we open our hearts for the reception, the gift will not be withheld, but God will not let it run like water spilled upon the ground that cannot be gathered up. If we will desire, if we will expect, if we will reckon on, if we will look to, Jesus Christ, and, beside all this, if we will honestly use the power that we possess, our capacity will grow, and the gift will grow, and our holiness and purity will grow with it.

Some of you have been trying more or less continuously, all your lives, to mend your own characters and improve yourselves. Brethren, there is a better way than that. A modern poet says—

  'Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,  
  These three alone lift life to sovereign power.'

Taken by itself that is pure heathenism. Self cannot improve self. Put self into God's keeping, and say, 'I cannot guard, keep, purge, hallow mine own self. Lord, do Thou do it for me!' It is no use to try to build a tower whose top shall reach to heaven. A ladder has been let down on which we may pass upwards, and by which God's angels of grace and beauty will come down to dwell in our hearts. If the Judge is to say of each of us, 'He was a good man,' He must also be able to say, 'He was full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.'

### A NICKNAME ACCEPTED

'The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch'—ACTS xi. 26.

Nations and parties, both political and religious, very often call themselves by one name, and are known to the outside world by another. These outside names are generally given in contempt; and yet they sometimes manage to hit the very centre of the characteristics of the people on whom they are bestowed, and so by degrees get to be adopted by them, and worn as an honour.

So it has been with the name 'Christian.' It was given at the first by the inhabitants of the Syrian city of Antioch, to a new sort of people that had sprung up amongst them, and whom they could not quite make out. They would not fit into any of their categories, and so they had to invent a new name for them. It is never used in the New Testament by Christians about themselves. It occurs here in this text; it occurs in Agrippa's half-contemptuous exclamation: 'You seem to think it is a very small matter to make me—me, a king!—a Christian, one of those despised people!' And it occurs once more, where the Apostle Peter is specifying the charges brought against them: 'If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Peter iv. 16). That sounds like the beginning of the process which has gone on ever since, by which the nickname, flung by the sarcastic men of Antioch, has been turned into the designation by which, all over the world, the followers of Jesus Christ have been proud to call themselves.

Now in this text there are the outside name by which the world calls the followers of Jesus Christ, and one of the many interior names by which the Church called itself. I have thought it might be profitable now to put all the New Testament names for Christ's followers together, and think about them.

I. So, to begin with, we deal with this name given by the world to the  
Church, which the Church has adopted.

Observe the circumstances under which it was given. A handful of large-hearted, brave men, anonymous fugitives belonging to the little Church in Jerusalem, had come down to Antioch; and there, without premeditation, without authority, almost without consciousness—certainly without knowing what a great thing they were doing—they took, all at once, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, a great step by preaching the Gospel to pure heathen Greeks; and so began the process by which a small Jewish sect was transformed into a world-wide church. The success of their work in Antioch, amongst the pure heathen population, has for its crowning attestation this, that it compelled the curiosity-hunting, pleasure-loving, sarcastic Antiocheans to find out a new name for this new thing; to write out a new label for the new bottles into which the new wine was being put. Clearly the name shows that the Church was beginning to attract the attention of outsiders.

Clearly it shows, too, that there was a novel element in the Church. The earlier disciples had been all Jews, and could be lumped together along with their countrymen, and come under the same category. But here was something that could not be called either Jew or Greek, because it embraced both. The new name is the first witness to the cosmopolitan character of the primitive Church. Then clearly, too, the name indicates that in a certain dim, confused way, even these superficial observers had got hold of the right notion of what it was that *did* bind these people together. They called them 'Christians'—Christ's men, Christ's followers. But it was only a very dim refraction of the truth that had got to them; they had no notion that 'Christ' was not a proper name, but the designation of an office; and they had no notion that there was anything peculiar or strange in the bond which united its adherents to Christ. Hence they called His followers 'Christians,' just as they would have called Herod's followers 'Herodians,' in the political world, or Aristotle's followers 'Aristotelians' in the philosophical world. Still, in their groping way, they bad put their finger on the fact that the one power that held this heterogeneous mass together, the one bond that bound up 'Jew and Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond and free' into one vital unity, was a personal relation to a living Person. And so they said—not understanding the whole significance of it, but having got hold of the right end of the clue—they said, 'They are Christians!' 'Christ's people,' 'the followers of this Christ.'

And their very blunder was a felicity. If they had called them 'Jesuits' that would have meant the followers of the mere man. They did not know how much deeper they had gone when they said, not followers of Jesus, but 'followers of Christ'; for it is not Jesus the Man, but Jesus Christ, the Man with His office, that makes the centre and the bond of the Christian Church.

These, then, are the facts, and the fair inferences from them. A plain lesson here lies on the surface. The Church—that is to say, the men and women who make its members—should draw to itself the notice of the outside world. I do not mean by advertising, and ostentation, and sounding trumpets, and singularities, and affectations. None of all these are needed. If you are live Christians it will be plain enough to outsiders. It is a poor comment on your consistency, if, being Christ's followers, you can go through life unrecognised even by 'them that are without.' What shall we say of leaven which does *not* leaven, or of light which does *not* shine, or of salt which does *not* repel corruption? It is a poor affair if, being professed followers of Jesus Christ, you do not impress the world with the thought that 'here is a man who does not come under any of our categories, and who needs a new entry to describe *him*.' The world ought to have the same impression about you which Haman had about the Jews—'Their laws are diverse from all people.'

Christian professors, are the world's names for each other enough to describe you by, or do you need another name to be coined for you in order to express the manifest characteristics that you display? The Church that does not *provoke* the attention—I use the word in its etymological, not its offensive sense—the Church that does not call upon itself the attention and interest of outsiders, is not a Church as Jesus Christ meant it to be, and it is not a Church that is worth keeping alive; and the sooner it has decent burial the better for itself and for the world!

There is another thing here, viz.: this name suggests that the clear impression made by our conduct and character, as well as by our words, should be that we belong to Jesus Christ. The eye of an outside observer may be unable to penetrate the secret of the deep sweet tie uniting us to Jesus, but there should be no possibility of the most superficial and hasty glance overlooking the fact that we *are* His. He should manifestly be the centre and the guide, the impulse and the pattern, the strength and the reward, of our whole lives. We are Christians. That should be plain for all folks to see, whether we speak or be silent. Brethren, is it so with you? Does your life need no commentary of your words in order that men should know what is the hidden spring that moves all its wheels; what is the inward spirit that co-ordinates all its motions into harmony and beauty? Is it true that like 'the ointment of the right hand which bewrayeth itself' your allegiance to Jesus Christ, and the overmastering and supreme authority which He exercises upon you, and upon your life, 'cannot be hid'? Do you think that, without your words, if you, living in the way you do, were put down into the middle of Pekin, as these handful of people were put down into the middle of the heathen city of Antioch, the wits of the Chinese metropolis would have to invent a name for you, as the clever men of Antioch did for these people; and do you think that if they had to invent a name, the name that would naturally come to their lips, looking at you, would be 'Christians,' 'Christ's men'? If it would not, there is something wrong.

The last word that I say about this first part of my text is this. It is a very sad thing, but it is one that is always occurring, that the world's inadequate notions of what makes a follower of Jesus Christ get accepted by the Church. Why was it that the name 'Christian' ran all over Christendom in the course of a century and a half? I believe very largely because it was a conveniently vague name; because it did not describe the deepest and sacredest of the bonds that unite us to Jesus Christ. Many a man is quite willing to say, 'I am a Christian,' who would hesitate a long time before he said, 'I am a believer,' 'I am a disciple.' The vagueness of the name, the fact that it erred by defect in not touching the central, deepest relation between man and Jesus Christ, made it very appropriate to the declining spirituality and increasing formalism of the Christian Church in the post-Apostolic age. It is a sad thing when the Church drops its standard down to the world's notion of what It ought to be, and adopts the world's name for itself and its converts.

II. I turn now to set side by side with this vague, general, outside name the more specific and *interior* names—if I may so call them—by which Christ's followers at first knew themselves.

The world said, 'You are Christ's men'; and the names which were self-imposed and are now to be considered might be taken as being the Church's explanation of what the world was fumbling at when it so called them. There are four of them: of course, I can only just touch on them.

(*a*) The first is in this verse-'*disciples*.' The others are *believers*, *saints*, *brethren*. These four are the Church's own christening of itself; its explanation and expansion, its deepening and heightening, of the vague name given by the world.

As to the first, *disciples*, any concordance will show that the name was employed almost exclusively during the time of Christ's life upon earth. It is the only name for Christ's followers in the Gospels; it occurs also, mingled with others, in the Acts of the Apostles, and it never occurs thereafter.

The name 'disciple,' then, carries us back to the historical beginning of the whole matter, when Jesus was looked upon as a Rabbi having followers called disciples; just as were John the Baptist and his followers, Gamaliel and his school, or Socrates and his. It sets forth Christ as being the Teacher, and His followers as being His adherents, His scholars, who learned at His feet.

Now that is always true. *We* are Christ's scholars quite as much as were the men who heard and saw with their eyes and handled with their hands, of the Word of Life. Not by words only, but by gracious deeds and fair, spotless life, He taught them and us and all men to the end of time, our highest knowledge of God of whom He is the final revelation, our best knowledge of what men should and shall be by His perfect life in which is contained all morality, our only knowledge of that future in that He has died and is risen and lives to help and still to teach. He teaches us still by the record of His life, and by the living influence of that Spirit whom He sends forth to guide us into all truth. He is the Teacher, the only Teacher, the Teacher for all men, the Teacher of all truth, the Teacher for evermore. He speaks from Heaven. Let us give heed to His voice.

But that Name is not enough to tell all that He is to us, or we to Him, and so after He had passed from earth it unconsciously and gradually dropped out of use by the disciples, as they felt a deepened bond uniting them to Him who was not only their Teacher of the Truth which was Himself, but was their Sacrifice and Advocate with the Father. And for all who hold the, as I believe, essentially imperfect conception of Jesus Christ as being mainly a Teacher, either by word or by pattern; whether it be put into the old form or into the modern form of regarding Him as the Ideal and Perfect Man, it seems to me a fact well worthy of consideration, that the name of disciple and the relation expressed by it were speedily felt by the Christian Church to be inadequate as a representation of the bond that knit them to Him. He is our Teacher, we His scholars. He is more than that, and a more sacred bond unites us to Him. As our Master we owe Him absolute submission. When He speaks, we have to accept His dictum. What He says is truth, pure and entire. His utterance is the last word upon any subject that He touches, it is the ultimate appeal, and the Judge that ends the strife. We owe Him submission, an open eye for all new truth, constant docility, as conscious of our own imperfections, and a confident expectation that He will bless us continuously with high and as yet unknown truths that come from His inexhaustible stores of wisdom and knowledge.

(*b*) Teacher and scholars move in a region which, though it be important, is not the central one. And the word that was needed next to express what the early Church felt Christ was to them, and they to Him, lifts us into a higher atmosphere altogether,—'*believers*,' they who are exercising not merely intellectual submission to the dicta of the Teacher, but who are exercising living trust in the person of the Redeemer. The belief which is faith is altogether a higher thing than its first stage, which is the belief of the understanding. There is in it the moral element of trust. We believe a truth, we trust a Person; and the trust which we are to exercise in Jesus Christ, and which knits us to Him, is our trust in Him, not in any character that we may choose to ascribe to Him, but in the character in which He is revealed in the New Testament—Redeemer, Saviour, Manifest God; and therefore, the Infinite Friend and Helper of our souls.

That trust, my brethren, is the one bond that binds, men to God, and the one thing that makes us Christ's men. Apart from it, we may be very near Him, but we are not joined to Him. By it, and by it alone, the union is completed, and His power and His grace flow into our spirits. Are you, not merely a 'Christian,' in the world's notion, being bound in some vague way to Jesus Christ, but are you a Christian in the sense of trusting your soul's salvation to Him?

(*c*) Then, still further, there is another name—'*saints*.' It has suffered perhaps more at the hands both of the world and of the Church than any other. It has been taken by the latter and restricted to the dead, and further restricted to those who excel, according to the fantastic, ascetic standard of mediaeval Christianity. It has suffered from the world in that it has been used with a certain bitter emphasis of resentment at the claim of superior purity supposed to be implied in it, and so has come to mean on the world's lips one who pretends to be better than other people and whose actions contradict his claim. But the name belongs to all Christ's followers. It makes no claim to special purity, for the central idea of the word 'saint' is not purity. Holiness, which is the English for the Latinised 'sanctity,' holiness which is attributed in the Old Testament to God first, to men only secondarily, does not primarily mean *purity*, but *separation*. God is holy, inasmuch as by that whole majestic character of His, He is lifted above all bounds of creatural limitations, as well as above man's sin. A sacrifice, the Sabbath, a city, a priest's garment, a mitre—all these things are 'holy,' not when they are pure, but when they are devoted to Him. And men are holy, not because they are clean, but because by free self-surrender they have consecrated themselves to Him.

Holiness is consecration, that is to say, holiness is giving myself up to Him to do what He will with. 'I am holy' is not the declaration of my estimate 'I am pure,' but the declaration of the fact 'I am thine, O Lord.' So the New Testament idea of saint has in it these elements—consecration, consecration resting on faith in Christ, and consecration leading to separation from the world and its sin. And that glad yielding of oneself to God, as wooed by His mercies, and thereby drawn away from communion with our evil surroundings and from submission to our evil selves, must be a part of the experience of every true Christian. All His people are saints, not as being pure, but as being given up to Him, in union with whom alone will the cleansing powers flow into their lives and clothe them with 'the righteousness of saints.' Have you thus consecrated yourself to God?

(*d*) The last name is '*brethren*,'—a name which has been much maltreated both by the insincerity of the Church, and by the sarcasm of the world. It has been an unreal appellation which has meant nothing and been meant to mean nothing, so that the world has said that our 'brethren' signified a good deal less than their 'brothers.' ''Tis true, 'tis pity; pity 'tis, 'tis true.'

But what I ask you to notice is that the main thing about that name 'brethren' is not the relation of the brethren to one another, but their common relation to their Father.

When we call ourselves as Christian people 'brethren,' we mean first this: that we are the possessors of a supernatural life, which has come from one Father, and which has set us in altogether new relations to one another, and to the world round about us. Do you believe that if you have any of that new life which comes through faith in Jesus Christ, then you are the brethren of all those that possess the same?

As society becomes more complicated, as Christian people grow unlike each other in education, in social position, in occupation, in their general outlook into the world, it is more and more difficult to feel what is nevertheless true: that any two Christian people, however unlike each other, are nearer each other in the very roots of their nature, than a Christian and a non-Christian, however like each other. It is difficult to feel that, and it is getting more and more difficult, but for all that it is a fact.

And now I wish to ask you, Christian men and women, whether you feel more at home with people who love Jesus Christ—as you say that you love Him—or whether you like better to be with people who do not?

There are some of you who choose your intimate associates, whom you ask to your homes and introduce to your children as desirable companions, with no reference at all to their religious character. The duties of your position, of course, oblige each of you to be much among people who do not share your faith, and it is cowardly and wrong to shrink from the necessity. But for Christian people to make choice of heart friends, or close intimates, among those who have no sympathy with their professed belief about, and love to, Jesus Christ, does not say much for the depth and reality of their religion. A man is known by the company he keeps, and if your friends are picked out for other reasons, and their religion is no part of their attraction, it is not an unfair conclusion that there are other things for which you care more than you do for faith in Jesus Christ and love to Him. If you deeply feel the bond that knits you to Christ, and really live near to Him, you will be near to your brethren. You will feel that 'blood is thicker than water,' and however like you may be to irreligious people in many things, you will feel that the deepest bond of all knits you to the poorest, the most ignorant, the most unlike you in social position; ay! and the most unlike you in theological opinion, who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Now that is the sum of the whole matter. And my last word to you is this: Do not you be contented with the world's vague notions of what makes Christ's man. I do not ask you if you are Christians; plenty of you would say: 'Oh yes! of course! Is not this a Christian country? Was not I christened when I was a child? Are we not all members of the Church of England by virtue of our birth? Yes! of course I am!'

I do not ask you that; *I* do not ask you anything; but I pray you to ask yourselves these four questions: Am I Christ's scholar? Am I believing on Him? Am I consecrated to Him? Am I the possessor of a new life from Him? And never give yourselves rest until you can say humbly and yet confidently, 'Yes! thank God, I am!'

# Gentile Faith; Jewish Fears (Acts 10:36-11:30)

Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130*](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130)

### Introduction[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P14_6430)

I have a friend who grew up in jail. This was not because he was a criminal, but because his father was the county sheriff for many years. The sheriff was in charge of the jail, and his family lived in the building where the jail was located. When my friend’s father died, I went to the funeral service. At the service, we met a man who had been confined to a wheelchair for some time. He shared a story about my friend’s father that illustrates our text in the Book of Acts.

It was the time of the county fair, and this handicapped fellow decided he wanted to attend. Upon his arrival, he went to the ticket booth to purchase his ticket. With ticket in hand, he made his way to the gate. The problem was that the gate was not wide enough for his wheelchair to pass through. The person at the gate seemed unsympathetic and unwilling to help. It was at this very moment that the sheriff arrived on the scene. He sized up the situation and with a mighty kick, knocked down the gate and helped the man through.

In [Acts 1](javascript:%7b%7d), our Lord gave this “Great Commission” to His disciples:

7 He told them, “You are not permitted to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth” ([Acts 1:7-8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The apostles were instructed to wait until the Spirit came upon them, empowering them to carry out the Great Commission.[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P20_8531) The Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, as described in [Acts 2](javascript:%7b%7d). The result was that Peter preached a powerful sermon which God used to save many. In the Spirit’s power, the apostles performed miracles, which provided more opportunities to proclaim the gospel (see [Acts 3](javascript:%7b%7d)). But as the apostles continued to heal and to preach in the name of Jesus, the Sadducees and other Jewish religious leaders became increasingly concerned, so that they began to persecute the apostles (see [Acts 4:1-31; 5:12-42](javascript:%7b%7d)). The powerful preaching of Stephen was answered by his stoning (see [Acts 6-7](javascript:%7b%7d)). This resulted in a great persecution that scattered the Jerusalem church abroad:

And Saul agreed completely with killing him. Now on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were forced to scatter throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria ([Acts 8:1](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The gospel was advancing in a way that partially fulfilled the Great Commission given in [Acts 1:8](javascript:%7b%7d), but this was far less than what our Lord had commanded. For one thing, the gospel was spread only as far as **“all Judea and Samaria”** ([Acts 8:1; 9:31](javascript:%7b%7d)).[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P23_9687) For another, the apostles had not yet come to terms with the fact that the gospel was the good news of salvation for Jews *and Gentiles*, without distinction. Up to this point in time, it was assumed that in order to be a Christian, one must either be Jewish, either by birth or by becoming a Jewish proselyte. The failure of the apostles to aggressively fulfill the Great Commission seems to have been fueled, to some degree, by their belief that the gospel should not go to the Gentiles. There were a few exceptions – God fearers – like the centurion in [Luke 7:2-10](javascript:%7b%7d), the Ethiopian eunuch, and Cornelius, but these all appear to be people of influence and means, who employed their resources in the service of Judaism.[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P24_10596)

There were certain excuses for the apostles’ inaction which could have been used. For example, we know from our text that they believed the Gentiles should not be evangelized as Gentiles because they were considered unclean,or because of the Jewish food laws. Also, someone might turn to those instances where our Lord seems to forbid His disciples to take the gospel to the Gentiles, or to the Samaritans (see [Matthew 10:5-6](javascript:%7b%7d)). But one must also explain why Jesus made it clear from the outset of His ministry that He had come to save Gentiles (see [Luke 4:16-30](javascript:%7b%7d)). And one must explain how Jesus Himself went into Gentile territory with the gospel ([John 4:3-42](javascript:%7b%7d); [Matthew 15:21-39](javascript:%7b%7d)). More than this, one must explain the words of Jesus to the centurion, by which He indicated that believing Gentiles will enter the kingdom while many Jews will not:

5 When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him asking for help: 6 “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible anguish.” 7 Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him.” 8 But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Instead, just say the word and my servant will be healed. 9 For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to this one, ‘Go’ and he goes, and to another ‘Come’ and he comes, and to my slave ‘Do this’ and he does it.” 10 When Jesus heard this he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “ **I tell you the truth, I have not found such faith in anyone in Israel! 11 I tell you, many will come from the east and west to share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**” 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go; just as you believed, it will be done for you.” And the servant was healed at that hour ([Matthew 8:5-13](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

In addition to this, one must explain why the Great Commission ([Matthew 28:18-20](javascript:%7b%7d); [Acts 1:7-8](javascript:%7b%7d)) clearly included going to the Gentiles. There was a major theological roadblock to the evangelization of Gentiles which had to be removed before the Great Commission could be fulfilled. In Acts, God has already dealt with Peter on this matter in chapter 10, and now through Peter, God will open the door to worldwide evangelism. Our text is foundational to the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of the church, and to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The truth that is unveiled here will become the bedrock foundation for much of the teaching we find in the New Testament. We must therefore listen carefully to what God has for His people to learn.

### The Gospel, Short and Simple [Acts 10:34-43](javascript:%7b%7d)

34 Then Peter started speaking: “I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people, 35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him. 36 You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all) – 37 you know what happened throughout Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John announced: 38 with respect to Jesus from Nazareth, that God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him. 39 We are witnesses of all the things he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him up on the third day and caused him to be seen, 41 not by all the people, but by us, the witnesses God had already chosen, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to warn them that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. 43 About him all the prophets testify, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” ([Acts 10:34-43](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Luke is preparing the reader for the next stage in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. In the first part of chapter 9, he records the dramatic conversion of Saul. Saul, soon to be known as Paul,[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P31_14797) will play a crucial role in the evangelization of the Gentiles. Another crucial role will be played by Peter. Peter was the one to whom the **“keys to the kingdom”** were given by our Lord ([Matthew 16:19](javascript:%7b%7d)). He must first be convinced that God has purposed the gospel to save Gentiles as well as Jews. We dealt with this in our last lesson ([Acts 9:32](javascript:%7b%7d)—10:35). Now we shall see how God used Peter and his visit to the home of Cornelius to convince his fellow apostles and others that the gospel is for Jews and Gentiles alike, without distinction.

After hearing how God had directed Cornelius to send for him (10:30-33), Peter shared what God had just taught him:

34 Then Peter started speaking: “I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people, 35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him” ([Acts 10:34-35](javascript:%7b%7d)).[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P34_15698)

Being Jewish did not give the Jewish people a “leg up” when it came to salvation. Not all Jews were destined to salvation ([Romans 9:6-8](javascript:%7b%7d)). While the Jews were privileged in many ways,[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P36_16050) they were not predisposed to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The law condemned Jews, just as it did Gentiles ([Acts 15:10-11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Romans 3:9-20](javascript:%7b%7d)). The Jews did fall under greater condemnation because of their greater knowledge ([Romans 2](javascript:%7b%7d)), and they were likewise judicially blinded ([Romans 11:25](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [2 Corinthians 3:12](javascript:%7b%7d)—4:4).

The gospel was not for Jews only. From the very beginning, God had purposed to save men from every race, tribe, and tongue:

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And **I will bless those who bless you**, And the one who curses you I will curse. **And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed**” ([Genesis 12:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB, emphasis mine).

9 And thus the Gentiles glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,   
“Because of this I will confess you among the Gentiles,   
and I will sing praises to your name.”

10 And again it says:   
“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”

11 And again,   
“Praise the Lord all you Gentiles,   
and let all the peoples praise him.”

12 And again Isaiah says,   
“The root of Jesse will come,   
and the one who rises to rule over the Gentiles,   
in him will the Gentiles hope” ([Romans 15:9-12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

9 They were singing a new song:   
“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were killed, and at the cost of your own blood you have purchased for God persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation. 10 You have appointed them as a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” ([Revelation 5:9-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

9 After these things I looked, and here was an enormous crowd that no one could count, made up of persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb dressed in long white robes, and with palm branches in their hands. 10 They were shouting out in a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God, to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ([Revelation 7:9-10](javascript:%7b%7d))

6 Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, and he had an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe, language, and people. 7 He declared in a loud voice: “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has arrived, and worship the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water!” ([Revelation 14:6-7](javascript:%7b%7d))

When we come to [Acts 10:36-43](javascript:%7b%7d), we find one of the most concise summations of the gospel in the Bible. It is almost as though Luke has provided us with a summary of the contents of one of the New Testament Gospels. Take note of the following elements:

1. The gospel began with the preaching of John the Baptist ([Acts 10:37](javascript:%7b%7d)).

2. The baptism of Jesus, when He was divinely designated as Messiah and empowered with the Holy Spirit ([Acts 10:38](javascript:%7b%7d)).

3. In His earthly ministry Jesus did good, healed the sick, and delivered those held captive by the devil ([Acts 10:38](javascript:%7b%7d)).

4. Jesus was crucified by those who rejected Him ([Acts 10:39](javascript:%7b%7d)).

5. The resurrection of Jesus was evidenced by His appearances to many, and to the apostles in particular (who were appointed to testify to His resurrection) ([Acts 10:40-41](javascript:%7b%7d)).

6. Jesus then gave His witnesses the Great Commission ([Acts 10:42](javascript:%7b%7d)).

7. Jesus is Lord of all ([Acts 10:36](javascript:%7b%7d)).

8. The Lord Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead ([Acts 10:42](javascript:%7b%7d)).

9. Everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus receives the forgiveness of their sins ([Acts 10:43](javascript:%7b%7d)).

10. This salvation is available to men of every nation, without distinction ([Acts 10:34-35](javascript:%7b%7d), 43).

11. This gospel is the fulfillment of the message of all the Old Testament prophets ([Acts 10](javascript:%7b%7d): 43).

### Salvation and the Witness of the Spirit [Acts 10:44-48](javascript:%7b%7d)

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were greatly astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, 46 for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, 47 “No one can withhold the water for these people to be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” 48 So he gave orders to have them baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for several days ([Acts 10:44-48](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Peter had not said all he intended, but obviously he had said enough. He was just warming up when the Spirit fell on all those who had gathered to hear him speak. It goes without saying that their hearts had been prepared because they immediately grasped the good news. (My assumption is that as Old Testament saints – God fearers – they already knew and believed[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P61_20841) most of what Peter told them.) What they really needed to hear was not only that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but that faith in Him would bring the forgiveness of sins, whether for the Jew or for the Gentile.

The divine witness to the salvation of these Gentiles came as the Spirit fell on all of them.[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P63_21187) The circumcised believers who accompanied Peter from Joppa were astounded **“that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out *even on the Gentiles*”** ([Acts 10:45](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine). They were speaking in tongues and praising God, just as men were when the Spirit came at Pentecost (see [Acts 2:4, 11](javascript:%7b%7d)). Peter really had no other choice than to order that these saints be baptized.

We are told that these saints asked Peter to stay on for several days, and it seems quite clear that this is what he did. I think this means several things. First, it seems to have given some time to return to Jerusalem ahead of Peter and to report these events to his staunch Jewish brethren (see [Acts 11:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d)). Second, it meant that Peter had to have stayed in this Gentile home and eaten Gentile food. It would have been one thing for Peter to have preached and then to have left immediately; he preached and stayed on, not unlike our Lord did in that Samaritan town ([John 4:39-43](javascript:%7b%7d)).

### Showdown in Jerusalem: From Protest to Praise [Acts 11:1-18](javascript:%7b%7d)

1 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles too had accepted the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers took issue with him, 3 saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and shared a meal with them.” 4 But Peter began and explained it to them point by point, saying, 5 “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, an object something like a large sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came to me. 6 As I stared I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild animals, reptiles, and wild birds. 7 I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; slaughter and eat!’ 8 But I said, ‘Certainly not, Lord, for nothing defiled or ritually unclean has ever entered my mouth!’ 9 But the voice replied a second time from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!’ 10 This happened three times, and then everything was pulled up to heaven again. 11 At that very moment, three men sent to me from Caesarea approached the house where we were staying. 12 The Spirit told me to accompany them without hesitation. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. 13 He informed us how he had seen an angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter, 14 who will speak a message to you by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ 15 Then as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as he did on us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, as he used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 17 Therefore if God gave them the same gift as he also gave us after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to hinder God?” 18 When they heard this, they ceased their objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted the repentance that leads to life even to the Gentiles” ([Acts 11:1-18](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Word of what had happened in Caesarea quickly reached the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem,[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P68_24691) even before Peter himself had returned. It is obvious that his Jewish brethren were distressed with what they had heard. The accusation they made against Peter is interesting:

“You went to uncircumcised men and shared a meal with them” ([Acts 11:3](javascript:%7b%7d)).

They faulted Peter for having eaten with men who were uncircumcised. Had those who had gathered in the home of Cornelius been Jewish proselytes, rather than mere “God fearers,” they would not have had grounds for objection. They don’t challenge Peter for preaching the gospel to Gentiles. They don’t question why he did not circumcise these believers. They don’t object to the fact that he had them baptized. But in my opinion, these things are really not what they objected to. They really objected to him preaching the gospel to Gentiles and to his accepting them as **“clean.”** Notice the conclusion these “concerned brethren” reached after Peter explained what happened:

“So then, God has granted the repentance that leads to life even to the Gentiles” ([Acts 11:18](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The real issue then was the evangelization of Gentiles, as Gentiles, without first requiring them to embrace Judaism by becoming Jewish proselytes.

Peter wisely and patiently retold the entire story to his Jewish brethren from the beginning. He started with his vision and reported how the Spirit had directed him to accompany the messengers Cornelius sent to bring him to Caesarea. God was in this from beginning to end. How could Peter do anything else? He clinches his defense by focusing on the baptism of the Spirit which he and his Jewish companions witnessed:

16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, as he used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 17 Therefore if God gave them the same gift as he also gave us after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to hinder God?” ([Acts 11:16-17](javascript:%7b%7d))

How does this make a compelling concluding argument? There are at least two forceful points contained in Peter’s argument. *First, Peter asserts to his Jewish brethren that what happened to Cornelius and his associates was precisely the same thing that happened to them at Pentecost.* These Gentiles received the gift of the Spirit in exactly the same way the Spirit fell on those who had gathered at Pentecost. My sense is that many of those who challenged Peter were present at the first Pentecost. One must conclude, then, that God did not distinguish between the first Jewish believers at Pentecost and these Gentile believers in Caesarea. How can one prohibit what God has produced? How can one view Gentiles as outsiders when God has placed His seal upon them?

*Second, Peter argues from the words of the Lord Jesus:*

“And I remembered the word of the Lord, as **he used to say**, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” ([Acts 11:16](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

We know our Lord spoke these words to His apostles in [Acts 1:5](javascript:%7b%7d), but Peter’s wording implies that Jesus made this statement at other times as well. How do these words justify Peter’s actions? Jesus promised that the Spirit would baptize them in the near future. This happened to Jewish believers at Pentecost. Now it has happened again, to Gentile believers in Caesarea. But more than this, our Lord’s words indicated a relationship between John’s baptism with water and the subsequent baptism of the Spirit.[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P79_28287)

I believe Peter’s logic works something like this. The Lord Jesus regarded John’s baptism as important (remember that our Lord’s disciples baptized as well – [John 4:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d)), but He also indicated, as did John,[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P81_28548) that there was to be a greater baptism than this, a baptism of the Spirit. The normal sequence at that point in time had been water baptism, then Spirit baptism.[14](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P82_28763) If Spirit baptism followed water baptism in Acts, and if Spirit baptism was greater than water baptism, then how could the former (water baptism) be denied when the latter (Spirit baptism) had already occurred? How could Peter say “No!” to water baptism when God had already said “Yes!” to Spirit baptism? Peter’s actions were in response to what God had said and done. No one could condemn Peter for acting consistently with God.

Just as Peter had no choice but to baptize these believing Gentiles, the circumcised believers who had initially objected to Peter’s actions now had no choice but to change their minds as well.

When they heard this, they ceased their objections and praised God, saying, “**So then, God has granted the repentance that leads to life even to the Gentiles**” ([Acts 11:18](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

For some reason, it had never occurred to these circumcised saints that God had purposed to save Gentiles as Gentiles, without having first become a Jewish proselyte. To us, this seems like a minor point. To these Jewish saints, it was a complete paradigm shift which turned their theology and practice upside-down. To the New Testament epistles and to us, this revelation is a foundational truth concerning the church.

I have struggled with this passage previously because I could not understand why Luke did not make more of [Mark 7](javascript:%7b%7d):

14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand. 15 There is nothing outside of a person that can defile him by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles him.” 17 Now when Jesus had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 He said to them, “Are you so foolish? Don’t you understand that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him? 19 For it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and then goes out into the sewer.” ( **This means all foods are clean**.) 20 He said, “What comes out of a person defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the human heart, come evil ideas, sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, evil, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and folly. 23 All these evils come from within and defile a person” ([Mark 7:14-23](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Why did Peter and Luke leap from his thrice-repeated vision about clean and unclean animals (food) to accepting Gentiles as fellow saints? I now see that I was reasoning in the wrong direction. I was reasoning that because Jesus had declared all foods clean, Peter was now free to preach the gospel to Gentiles. But the reasoning is really the reverse. Gentiles are clean, not because of what they eat, but because of the saving work of Jesus Christ on their behalf, a work they have embraced by faith. In [Mark 7](javascript:%7b%7d), Jesus taught that it was not food that defiles men; what defiles us is what comes out of us (wicked thoughts, words, deeds), not what goes into us (food). The reason fellowship with Gentiles is allowed (including eating their food) is because God has saved them; God has given them clean hearts. Because He has made believing Gentiles clean, we can fellowship with them as peers. It is not about external things like food, but about internal things like a changed heart. God made Gentiles clean by saving them, and thus neither Peter nor any Jewish saint should dare to call them unclean by refusing fellowship with them.

### The Church at Antioch [Acts 11:19-30](javascript:%7b%7d)

19 Now those who had been scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one but Jews. 20 But there were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene among them who came to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks too, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus. 21 The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 A report about them came to the attention of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts, 24 because he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a significant number of people were brought to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught a significant number of people. Now it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.

27 At that time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, got up and predicted by the Spirit that a severe famine was about to come over the whole inhabited world. (This took place during the reign of Claudius.) 29 So the disciples, each in accordance with his financial ability, decided to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. 30 They did so, sending their financial aid to the elders by Barnabas and Saul ([Acts 11:19-30](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When we come to [Acts 11:19](javascript:%7b%7d) we find several significant changes:

*(1) We have a change in personnel.* Luke changes from Peter and his fellow Hebraic Jews to Barnabas and Saul, who are Hellenistic Jews.

*(2) We have a change in time*. At [Acts 11:19](javascript:%7b%7d), we are taken back to the time frame of [Acts 8:1](javascript:%7b%7d) – Stephen’s death, the resulting persecution of the church, and the scattering of the saints.

*(3) We have a change in place.* We move from Jerusalem to Antioch.

I must confess that because of these changes, I have agonized about verses 19-30. I couldn’t decide whether to include them with this lesson, and thus to keep them with chapter 11, or whether to include them in the next lesson, with chapter 12. So how do these changes justify dealing with [Acts 11:19-30](javascript:%7b%7d) as a part of the previous context? I think I’m beginning to understand the flow of Luke’s argument here. See if you agree.

More than the change in place or personnel, I was troubled by the change in time that occurs at [Acts 11:19](javascript:%7b%7d). Why go back to the time frame of [Acts 8:1](javascript:%7b%7d)? I believe it is because Luke wants us to see that God is orchestrating a most important event by achieving two things simultaneously. We have observed simultaneous action already, beginning at [Acts 8:1](javascript:%7b%7d). While God was preparing the Ethiopian eunuch for salvation, He was also guiding Philip to their meeting place in the desert ([Acts 8:26-40](javascript:%7b%7d)). While God was preparing Saul for conversion, He was preparing Ananias for meeting with Saul to restore his sight ([Acts 9:1-19](javascript:%7b%7d)). While God was preparing Cornelius for the arrival of Peter, He was also preparing Peter to go to the home of a Gentile ([Acts 10:1-33](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The same thing is happening in our text. While God is preparing the Jerusalem church to acknowledge the inclusion of Gentile believers into the church – thus paving the way for the fulfillment of the Great Commission ([Acts 11:1-18](javascript:%7b%7d)) – He is also beginning to evangelize Gentiles in Antioch ([Acts 11:19](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.). Thus, the stoning of Stephen brought about the persecution and the scattering of the Jerusalem church, resulting in: (a) the conversion of Jews and Samaritans[15](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P99_35871) ([Acts 8:1-25](javascript:%7b%7d)); and, (b) the salvation of Gentiles like the Ethiopian eunuch ([Acts 8:26-40](javascript:%7b%7d)), those in the household of Cornelius, and those in Antioch ([Acts 10:1](javascript:%7b%7d)—11:30).

While the Jews in Jerusalem were debating the legitimacy of the salvation of Gentiles ([Acts 11:1-18](javascript:%7b%7d)), God was already at work saving Gentiles. I think that it was very shortly after the decision of [Acts 11:18](javascript:%7b%7d) was reached that God brought the news of the church in Antioch to the church in Jerusalem. This is the reason for the sequence of events as we find them in Luke’s account. What the Jerusalem church leaders (including the apostles) had decided in principle ([Acts 11:18](javascript:%7b%7d)), they now had to act upon in practice – by sending Barnabas to Antioch ([Acts 11:20](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.).

God did not require the Hebraic Jerusalem Jews (the apostles and others) to lead the charge in evangelizing to the **“uttermost part”** of the earth. As the Scripture says, **“. . . he knows what we are made of; he realizes we are made of clay”** ([Psalm 103:14](javascript:%7b%7d)). Instead, God raised up Hellenistic Jews like Stephen and Philip ([Acts 6-8](javascript:%7b%7d)) and Saul ([Acts 9](javascript:%7b%7d)) to carry the torch of Gentile evangelism. But it was important – indeed it was necessary – for the apostles and the Jerusalem Hebraic Jews to acknowledge this truth so fundamental to the life and function of the church: In Christ God has brought together in one body, the church, both Jews and Gentiles, without partiality. Jews and Gentiles are equal members in the body of Christ.

26 For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female – for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise ([Galatians 3:26-29](javascript:%7b%7d)).

[Acts 11:19-26](javascript:%7b%7d) is a wonderful account about this magnificent man, Barnabas, who was indeed **“a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith”** ([Acts 11:24](javascript:%7b%7d)). He not only acknowledged the salvation of these Gentiles, he delighted in it ([Acts 11:23](javascript:%7b%7d)). And he wisely sought out Saul to come and minister to this new church ([Acts 11:25-26](javascript:%7b%7d)). Surely this is the beginning of a wonderful partnership of Barnabas and Paul in the gospel that will blossom in the near future ([Acts 13:1](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.). Above and beyond all of this, we see that God has begun to evangelize the Gentiles, and that this Gentile evangelization has been sanctioned by the Hebraic Jerusalem Jews, including, in particular, the apostles. This is a monumental precedent in the history of the church.

The closing verses of [Acts 11](javascript:%7b%7d) – verses 27-30 – are significant in several ways. *First, this passage once again demonstrates that when someone becomes a saint, their wallet is likewise sanctified.* One finds it difficult to ignore Luke’s emphasis on financial generosity as a result of coming to faith in Jesus. We find this stated in [Acts 2:44-45](javascript:%7b%7d); in [Acts 4:34-37](javascript:%7b%7d); and again (somewhat less directly) in [Acts 6:1-6](javascript:%7b%7d). Now, in [Acts 11:27-30](javascript:%7b%7d), we find the newly-saved saints in Corinth sharing their financial resources with the needy Jewish saints in Judea and Jerusalem. Loving God is accompanied by a love for others ([Matthew 22:34-40](javascript:%7b%7d); [Romans 13:8-10](javascript:%7b%7d)). And our love flows from God’s love for us ([1 John 4:19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Second, we find that the generosity of the saints in Antioch is practiced even before the actual crisis has come.* Prophets, including Agabus, arrived in Antioch with the revelation that a famine was coming to the whole world. The saints were told there would be a famine in the near future. (It wouldn’t require a prophet to inform you of an existing famine.) The saints at Antioch began to set money aside before the crisis had even come, so that funds would be on hand when they were needed. This is anticipatory generosity. The point is that these new Gentile believers were eager to give to their Jewish brethren.

*Third, these verses demonstrate that accepting Gentiles as fellow believers was not a decision that put the Jews at a disadvantage, but one that resulted in blessing for the Jewish saints*. For some, accepting Gentile evangelism probably came hard (see [Acts 15:1](javascript:%7b%7d)). Was accepting the Gentiles as fellow believers a burden that Jewish saints must begrudgingly bear? As Paul would say, **“God forbid!”**[16](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P107_40274) Shortly after the church in Antioch was born, they began to demonstrate their unity with their Jewish brethren by sharing with them in their time of need. Embracing Gentile saints was a blessing to the Jews, and not a curse.

### Conclusion

When I was in college, I majored in political science. One of my courses was Constitutional Law. In this course, I learned about some Supreme Court decisions which were landmark rulings that set a precedent of great magnitude. The conversion of Cornelius and those gathered with him resulted in a decision by the Jerusalem church leaders which set the course for the church and the rest of the New Testament. It removed a significant theological roadblock to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The gospel was intended for both Jews and Gentiles, without distinction. The New Testament writers – Paul in particular – will herald and expound this theme:

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh – who are called “uncircumcision” by the so-called “circumcision” that is performed on the body by human hands – 12 that you were at that time without the Messiah, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who used to be far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, the one who made both groups into one and who destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility, 15 when he nullified in his flesh the law of commandments in decrees. He did this to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace, 16 and to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, 18 so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household, 20 because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit ([Ephesians 2:11-22](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Let us conclude by considering some of the implications and applications of this text for Christians today.

*(1) This is the gospel, by which all men can be saved.*I don’t know of any text that summarizes the gospel more concisely than Peter’s words, spoken to Cornelius and those with him. This is the gospel in a nutshell. Our Lord came to this earth, was baptized by John and by the Holy Spirit. In this way, He was designated as God’s Messiah and was empowered to carry out His earthly ministry. Jesus did many miracles, setting Himself apart from all others. He was the Messiah, but He was rejected and crucified by those He came to save. God overruled this by raising Jesus from the dead. He provided convincing proof of this resurrection by many appearances to those appointed as witnesses. The apostles were witnesses of the resurrection, appointed to proclaim the gospel to all who would believe, Jew or Gentile. Jesus will come again to judge those who have rejected Him. He is Lord of all. Have you trusted in Jesus?

*(2) There is but one gospel, by which Jews and Gentiles alike must be saved.*There are some today who would suggest that while Jesus may be “a way,” He is not **“the way.”** The Bible teaches that Jesus is the only way to heaven: *Jesus replied, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” ([John 14:6](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be saved”* ([Acts 4:12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Jews and Gentiles alike can find the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of heaven only through faith in Jesus.

*(3) The gospel is only for those who are unclean and completely unworthy of it.* One of the reasons why we are disobedient to the Great Commission is that we do not wish to preach the gospel to those we deem unworthy of it. Earlier in our service today, one of our missionaries told us that some of the tribes where he serves questioned the wisdom of going to this one particular tribe with the gospel. What was worse, some fellow missionaries even questioned going to this tribe. We all have people whom we deem unworthy of the gospel, or unsavable. Our text should remind us that the gospel is only for those who are unworthy of salvation and who cannot make themselves acceptable in God’s sight. May I ask you to consider those whom you may have deemed unworthy of the gospel? *God wants to teach us that all men are unworthy of the gospel, but that the gospel is for all men.* *That is because the gospel is the good news that salvation is a gift, given by grace through faith in Jesus.*

*(4) Salvation is of the Lord.* It wasn’t Peter who took the initiative to bring the gospel to Cornelius and his household; it was God. God prepared Peter and those who would hear his message. It wasn’t Peter who persuaded Cornelius and friends to believe; God did. They came to faith apart from an invitation. And it wasn’t Peter who baptized them in the Spirit. Peter was an instrument in the hands of the Redeemer, but he wasn’t the cause of these conversions.

We live at a time when people are obsessed with methods. They wish to know the methods of those who are successful. This is not altogether a bad thing. But let us take note that the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul, and Cornelius were not saved because of some slick evangelistic approach. They were saved because God prepared their hearts and drew them to Himself by faith. More important than having the right method is preserving and proclaiming the right message. Many are seeking to modify the message of the gospel to make it more palatable. Our task is to proclaim the gospel that God has given us in His Word, the gospel that Peter and Paul have proclaimed in the Book of Acts. If salvation is **“of the Lord”** – and it surely is – then let us spend more time in His Word and in prayer, asking God to prepare the hearts of lost people and to draw them to faith.

*(5) I am amazed at the faith of men like Cornelius.* How quickly and eagerly he embraces the gospel. Here is a man who must have been an Old Testament saint at the time the gospel came to him. No wonder he is so quick to respond to the truth of the gospel. It is men like Cornelius who help me understand why Paul could so quickly appoint elders in the churches he planted. These church leaders must have been Gentiles who were very much like Cornelius, men who had considerable knowledge from the Old Testament, as well as knowledge about the life and ministry of Jesus. It was a short leap, so to speak, to trust in Jesus as the Promised Messiah, and to understand that He saves both Jews and Gentiles alike, on the basis of faith.

*(6) The baptism of the Spirit (Pentecost) and even the filling of the Spirit does not make one instantly spiritual, nor does it insure that one’s understanding of Scripture is complete.*Peter and his fellow apostles had been baptized by the Spirit at Pentecost, but they were surely wrong about the Gentiles and salvation. I sometimes hear or read of those who seem to think that if they’ve experienced the Spirit as folks did in the Book of Acts, they are assured of being spiritual, and of being right in their interpretation of Scripture. Peter was an apostle, and he was Spirit-filled at Pentecost. But Peter did not have it all figured out the moment the Spirit came upon him. It took the dramatic events of our text to convince Peter that he was wrong.

This text has removed all of our excuses for not seeking to fulfill the Great Commission. May God grant us the grace to pursue the evangelization of lost men, women and children, from every people group, tongue and tribe, to the glory of God.

[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P12_5527) Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the NET Bible. The NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION, also known as THE NET BIBLE, is a completely new translation of the Bible, not a revision or an update of a previous English version. It was completed by more than twenty biblical scholars who worked directly from the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. The translation project originally started as an attempt to provide an electronic version of a modern translation for electronic distribution over the Internet and on CD (compact disk). Anyone anywhere in the world with an Internet connection will be able to use and print out the NET Bible without cost for personal study. In addition, anyone who wants to share the Bible with others can print unlimited copies and give them away free to others. It is available on the Internet at: [www.netbible.org](http://www.netbible.org).

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[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P20_8532) [Acts 1:4-5](javascript:%7b%7d).

[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P23_9688) We will shortly see from [Acts 11:20](javascript:%7b%7d) there were some who went out from Jerusalem who did preach the gospel to Gentiles, but this was not initiated or sanctioned, as yet, by the apostles.

[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P24_10597) See [Luke 7:3-5](javascript:%7b%7d); [Acts 10:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d), 31.

[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P31_14798) See [Acts 13:9](javascript:%7b%7d).

[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P34_15699) See how Paul develops this theme in [Romans 2:15-16](javascript:%7b%7d), 25-29. Those who would suggest that Peter and Paul were at odds with each other are simply (and badly) mistaken.

[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P36_16051) See [Romans 9:4-5](javascript:%7b%7d).

[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P61_20842) Take note of **“you know”** in [Acts 10:37](javascript:%7b%7d).

[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P63_21188) There is a certain similarity here to the baptism of our Lord. It was as the Spirit came upon our Lord and remained on Him that John the Baptist recognized Jesus as the Messiah ([John 1:32-34](javascript:%7b%7d)). Our Lord’s baptism designated Him as the Messiah and empowered Him for His ministry. When the Spirit baptized Cornelius and his household, it designated them as true believers.

[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P68_24692) It seems as though the only news communicated was that Peter had gone to a Gentile home, eaten with them, and preached the gospel. The full account of what happened does not seem to be told until Peter himself tells it.

[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P79_28288) We see this same connection again in [Acts 19:1-7](javascript:%7b%7d).

[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P81_28549) See [Matthew 3:11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 1:8](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 3:16](javascript:%7b%7d); [John 1:33](javascript:%7b%7d).

[14](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P82_28764) See also [Acts 19:5-6](javascript:%7b%7d).

[15](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P99_35872) Who were considered half-Jews.

[16](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P107_40275) See, for example, [Romans 3:4, 6, 31](javascript:%7b%7d). It is now translated **“Absolutely not!”** (NET Bible) or **“May it never be”** (NASB), but I still like the old King James rendering, **“God forbid!”**

***Repentance Unto Life***

September 23, 1855  
by  
C. H. SPURGEON  
(1834-1892)

"Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."—Acts 11:18.

One of the greatest obstacles which the Christian religion ever overcame, was the inveterate prejudice which possessed the minds of its earliest followers. The Jewish believers, the twelve apostles, and those whom Jesus Christ had called from the dispersed of Israel, were so attached to the idea that salvation was of the Jews, and that none but the disciples of Abraham, or, at any rate, the circumcised ones, could be saved, that they could not bring themselves to the thought that Jesus had come to be the Savior of all nations, and that in him should all the people of the earth be blessed. It was with difficulty they could allow the supposition; it was so opposite to all their Jewish education, that we find them summoning Peter before a council of Christians, and saving to him, "thou wentest in to men uncircumcised and didst eat with them." Nor could Peter exonerate himself until he had rehearsed the matter fully, and said that God had appeared unto him in a vision, declaring, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common," and that the Lord had bidden him preach the gospel to Cornelius and his household, inasmuch as they were believers. After this the power of grace was so mighty that these Jews could no longer withstand it: and in the teeth of all their previous education, they at once assumed the broad principle of Christianity," and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Let us bless God that now we are free from the trammels of Judaism, and that we are not under those of a Gentilism which has in its turn excluded the Jew, but that we live so near the blessed time that is coming, when Jew and Gentile, bond and free, shall feel themselves one in Jesus Christ our Head. I am not now, however, about to enlarge upon this, but my subject this morning is "Repentance unto life." May God give me grace so to speak to you that his word may be as a sharp sword, "piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow."  
  
By "Repentance unto life," I think we are to understand *that* repentance which is accompanied by spiritual life in the soul, and ensures eternal life to every one who possesses it. "Repentance unto life," I say, brings with it spiritual life, or rather, is the first consequent thereof. There are repentances which are not signs of life, except of natural life, because they are only effected by the power of the conscience and the voice of nature speaking in men; but the repentance here spoken of is produced by the Author of life, and when it comes, it begets such life in the soul, that he who was "dead in trespasses and sins," is quickened together with Christ; he who had no spiritual susceptibilities, now "receives with meekness the engrafted word;" he who slumbered in the very center of corruption, receives power to become one of the sons of God, and to be near his throne. This I think is "repentance unto life,"—that which gives life unto a dead spirit. I have said also, this repentance ensures eternal life; for there are repentances of which you hear men speaks which do not secure the salvation of the soul. Some preachers will affirm that men may repent, and may believe, and yet may fall away and perish. We will not consume our time by stopping to expose their error this morning; we have often considered it before, and have refuted all that they could say in defense of their dogma. Let us think of an infinitely better repentance. The repentance of our test is not their repentance, but it is a "repentance unto life;" a repentance which is a true sign of eternal salvation in Christ; a repentance which preserves us through this temporary state in Jesus, and which when we are passed into eternity, gives us a bliss which cannot be destroyed. "Repentance unto life "is the act of salvation of the soul, the germ which contains all the essentials of salvation, which secures them to us, and prepares us for them.  
  
We are this morning to give a very careful and prayerful attention to the "repentance" which is "unto life." First, I shall devote a few minutes to the consideration of *false repentance;* secondly, I shall consider *the signs that mark true repentance;* and after that, I shall extol the *divine beneficence,* of which it is written, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."  
  
I. First, then, we will consider certain FALSE REPENTANCES. I will begin with this remark—*that trembling beneath the sound of the gospel is not "repentance."* There are many men who when they hear a faithful gospel sermon, are exceedingly stirred and moved by it. By a certain power which accompanies the Word, God testifies that it is his own Word, and he causes those who hear it involuntarily to tremble. I have seen some men, while the truths of Scripture have been sounded from this pulpit, whose knees have knocked together, whose eyes have flowed with tears as if they had been fountains of water. I have witnessed the deep dejection of their spirit, when—as some of them have told me—they have been shaken until they knew not how to abide the sound of the voice, for it seemed like the terrible trumpet of Sinai thundering only their destruction. Well, my hearers, you may be very much disturbed under the preaching of the gospel, and yet you shall not have that "repentance unto life." You may know what it is to be very seriously and very solemnly affected when you go to God's house, and yet you may be hardened sinners. Let me confirm the remark by an instance:—Paul stood before Felix with the chains upon his hands, and as he preached of "righteousness, temperance, and of judgment to come," it is written, "Felix trembled,'' and yet procrastinating Felix is in perdition, among the rest of those who have said, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a more convenient season I will call for thee." There are many of you who cannot attend the house of God without being alarmed; you know what it is often to stand aghast at the thought that God will punish you; you may often have been moved to sincere emotion under God's minister; but, let me tell you, you may be after all a castaway, because you have not repented of your sins, neither have you turned to God.  
  
Further still. It is quite possible that you may not only tremble before God's Word, but you may become a sort of amiable Agrippa, and *be "almost persuaded" to turn to Jesus Christ, and yet have no "repentance;"* you may go further and even desire the gospel; you may say: "Oh! this gospel is such a goodly thing I would I had it. It ensures so much happiness here, and so much joy hereafter, I wish I might call it mine." Oh! it is good, thus to hear this voice of God! but you may sit, and, while some powerful text is being well handled, you may say, "I think it is true;" but it must enter the heart before you can repent. You may even go upon your knees in prayer and you may ask with a terrified lip that this may be blessed to your soul; and after all you may be no child of God. You may say as Agrippa said unto Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian;" yet, like Agrippa, you may never proceed beyond the "almost." He was "almost persuaded to be a Christian," but not "altogether." Now, how many of you here have been; almost persuaded" and yet you are not really in the way of eternal life. How often has conviction brought you on your knees and you have "almost" repented, but you have remained there, without actually repenting. See that corpse? It is lately dead. It has scarcely acquired the ghastliness of death, the color is still life-like. Its hand is still warm; you may fancy it is alive, and it seems almost to breathe. Every thing is there—the worm hath scarcely touched it dissolution hath scarcely approached; there is no foeted smell—yet life is gone; life is not there. So it is with you: you are almost alive; you have almost every external organ of religion which the Christian has; but you have not life. You may have repentance, but not sincere repentance. O hypocrite! I warn you this morning, you may not only tremble but feel a complacency towards the Word of God, and yet after all not have "repentance unto life." You may sink down into the pit that is bottomless, and hear it said, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."  
  
Yet, again, it is possible for men to progress even further than this, and positively to *humble themselves under the hand of God, and yet they may be total strangers to repentance.* Their goodness is not like the morning cloud and the early dew that passeth away, but when the sermon is heard they go home and commence what they conceive to be the work of repentance, they renounce certain vices and follies, they clothe themselves in sack-cloth, their tears flow very freely on account of what they have done; they weep before God; and yet with all that, their repentance is but a temporary repentance, and they go back to their sins again. Do you deny that such a penitence can exist? Let me tell you of a case. A certain man named Ahab coveted the vineyard of his neighbor Naboth, who would not sell it for a price, nor make an exchange. He consulted with his wife Jezebel, who contrived to put Naboth to death, and thus secure the vineyard to the king. After Naboth was put to death, and Ahab had taken possession of the vineyard, the servant of the Lord met Ahab, and said to him, "Hast thou killed, and also taken possession. Thus saith the Lord, in the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall the dogs lick thy blood, even thine. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy prosperity "We read that Ahab went awe, and humbled himself; and the Lord said, "Because Ahab humbleth himself before me I will not bring evil in his days." He had granted him some kind of mercy; but we read in the very next chapter that Ahab rebelled, and in a battle in Ramoth-Gilead, according to the servant of the Lord, he was slain there; so that "the dogs licked his blood "in the very vineyard of Naboth. You, too, I tell you, may humble yourselves before God for a time, and yet remain the slaves of your transgressions. You are afraid of damnation, but you are not afraid of sinning: you are afraid of hell, but you are not afraid of your iniquities; you are afraid of being cast into the pit, but not afraid to harden your hearts against his commands. Is it not true, O sinner, that you are trembling at hell? It is not the soul's state that troubles you, but hell. If hell were extinguished, your repentance would be extinguished; if the terrors awaiting you were withdrawn, you would sin with a higher hand than before, and your soul would be hardened, and would rebel against its sovereign. Be not deceived, my brethren, here; examine yourselves whether you are in the faith; ask yourselves if you have that which is "repentance unto life;" for you may humble yourselves for a time, and yet never repent before God.  
  
Beyond this many advance, and yet fall short of grace. *It is possible that you may confess your sins, and yet may not repent.* You may approach God, and tell him you are a wretch indeed; you may enumerate a long list of your transgressions and of the sins that you have committed, without a sense of the heinousness of your guilt, without a spark of real hatred of your deeds. You may confess and acknowledge your transgressions, and yet have no abhorrence of sin; and if you do not in the strength of God resist sin, if you do not turn from it, this fancied repentance shall be but the guilding which displays the paint which decorates; it is not the grace which transforms into gold, which will abide the fire. You may even, I say confess your faults, and yet have not repentance.  
  
Once more, and then I have gone to the farthest thought I have to give on this point. *You may do some work meet for repentance, and yet you may be impenitent.* Let me give you a proof of this in a fact authenticated by inspiration.  
  
Judas betrayed his Master; and after having done so, an overwhelming sense of the enormous evil he had committed seized upon him. His guilt buried all hope of repentance, and in the misery of desperation, not the grief of true regret, he confessed his sin to the high priests, crying, "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us, see thou to that." Whereupon he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, to show that he could not bear to carry the price of guilt upon him; and left them there. He went out, and—was he saved? No. "He went out and hanged himself." And even then the vengeance of God followed him: for when he had hanged himself he fell from the height where he was suspended, and was dashed to pieces; he was lost, and his soul perished. Yet see what this man did. He had sinned, he confessed his wrong, he returned the gold; still after all that, he was a castaway. Does not this make us tremble? You see how possible it is to be the ape of the Christian so nearly, that wisdom itself, if it be only mortal, may be deceived.  
  
II. Now, having thus warned you that there are many false kinds of repentance, I propose to occupy a short time by some remarks on TRUE REPENTANCE, and the signs whereby we may discern whether we have that "repentance" which is "unto life."  
  
First of all, let me correct one or two mistakes which those who are coming to Jesus Christ very often make. One is, they frequently think they must have deep, horrible, and awful manifestations of the terrors of law and of hell before they can be said to repent. How many have I conversed with, who have said to me what I can only translate into English to you this morning something in this way: "I do not repent enough, I do not feel myself enough of a sinner I have not been so gross and wicked a transgressor as many—I could almost wish I had; not because I love sin, but because then I think I should have deeper convictions of my guilt, and feel more sure that I had truly come to Jesus Christ." Now it is a great mistake to imagine that these terrible and horrible thoughts of a coming judgment have anything to do with the validity of "repentance." They are very often not the gift of God at all, but the insinuations of the devil; and even where the law worketh and produceth these thoughts, you must not regard them as being part and parcel of "repentance." They do not enter into the essence of repentance. "Repentance" is a hatred of sin; it is a turning from sin and a determination in the strength of God to forsake it. "Repentance" is a hatred of sin, and a forsaking it. It is possible for a man to repent without any terrific display of the terrors of the law; he may repent without having heard the trumpet sounds of Sinai, without having heard more than a distant rumble of its thunder. A man may repent entirely through the power of the voice of mercy. Some hearts God opens to faith, as in the case of Lydia. Others he assaults with the sledge hammer of the wrath to come; some he opens with the picklock of grace, and some with the crowbar of the law. There may be different ways of getting there, but the question is, has he got there? Is he there? It often happens that the Lord is not in the tempest or in the earthquake, but in the "still small voice."  
  
There is another mistake many poor people make when they are thinking about salvation, and that is—that they cannot repent enough; they imagine that were they to repent up to a certain degree, they would be saved. "Oh, sir!" some of you will say, "I have not penitence enough." Beloved, let me tell you that there is not any eminent degree of "repentance" which is necessary to salvation. You know there are degrees of faith, and yet the least faith saves; so there are degrees of repentance, and the least repentance will save the soul if it is sincere. The Bible says, "He that believeth shall be saved," and when it says that, it includes the very smallest degree of faith. So when it says, "Repent and be saved," it includes the man who has the lowest degree of real repentance. Repentance, moreover, is never perfect in any man in this mortal state. We never get perfect faith so as to be entirely free from doubting; and we never get repentance which is free from some hardness of heart. The most sincere penitent that you know will feel himself to be partially impenitent. Repentance is also a continual life-long act. It will grow continually. I believe a Christian on his death-bed will more bitterly repent than ever he did before. It is a thing to be done all your life long. Sinning and repenting—sinning and repenting, make up a Christian's life. Repenting and believing in Jesus—repenting and believing in Jesus, make up the consummation of his happiness. You must not expect that you will be perfect in "repentance" before you are saved. No Christian can be perfect. "Repentance" is a grace. Some people preach it as a condition of salvation. Condition of nonsense! There are no conditions of salvation. God gives the salvation himself; and he only gives it to those to whom he will. He says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy "If, then, God has given you the least repentance, if it be sincere repentance, praise him for it, and expect that repentance will grow deeper and deeper as you go further on. Then this remark I think, ought to be applied to all Christians. Christian men and women, you feel that you have not deep enough repentance. You feel that you have not faith large enough. What are you to do? Ask for an increase of faith, and it will grow. So with repentance. Have you ever tried to get deep repentance? My friends, if you have failed therein, still trust in Jesus, and try every day to get a penitential spirit, Do not expect, I say again, to have perfect repentance at first; sincere penitence you must have, and then under divine grace you will go on from strength to strength, until at last you shall hate and abhor sin as a serpent or a viper, and then shall you be near, very near, the perfection of repentance. These few thoughts, then, in opening the subject. And now you say, what are the signs of true "repentance" in the sight of God?  
  
First, I tell you, there is always *sorrow* with it. No man ever repents of sin without having some kind of sorrow with it. More or less intense, it may be, according to the way in which God calls him, and his previous manner of life, but there must be some sorrow. We do not care when it comes, but at some time or other it must come, or it is not the repentance of the Christian. I knew a man once who professed that he had repented, and he certainly was a changed character, so far as the external was concerned, but I never could see that he had any real sorrow for sin, neither when he professed to believe in Jesus did I ever see any marks of penitence in him. I considered in that man it was a kind of ecstatic jump into grace; and I found afterwards he had just as ecstatic a jump into guilt again He was not a sheep of God, for he had not been washed in penitence: for all God's people have to be washed there when converted from their sins. No man can come to Christ and know his pardon without feeling that sin is a hateful thing, for it put Jesus to death. Ye who have tearless eyes, unbended knees, unbroken hearts, how can ye think ye are saved? The gospel promised salvation only to those who really repent.  
  
Lest, however, I should hurt some of you, and make you feel what I do not intend, let me remark that I do not mean to say that you must shed actual tears. Some men are so hard in constitution that they could not shed a tear. I have known some who have been able to sigh and to groan, but tears would not come. Well, I say, that though the tear often affords evidence of penitence, you may have "repentance unto life" without it. What I would have you understand is, that there must be some real sorrow. If the prayer may not be vocal, it must be secret. There must be a groan if there is no word; there must be a sigh if there be no tear, to show the repentance, even though it be but small.  
  
There must be in this repentance, I think, not only sorrow, but there must be practice—practical repentance.

"'Tis not enough to say we're sorry, and repent,  
And then go on from day to day just as we always went"

Many people are very sorry and very penitent for their past sins Hear them talk. "Oh!" they say, "I deeply regret that ever I should have been a drunkard; and I sincerely bemoan that I should have fallen into that sin; I deeply lament that I should have done so." Then they go straight home; and when one; o'clock on Sunday comes you will find them at it again. And yet such people say they have repented Do you believe them when they say they are sinners, but do not love sin? They may not love it for the time; but can they be sincerely penitent, and then go and transgress again immediately, in the same way as they did before? How can we believe you if you transgress again and again, and do not forsake your sin? We know a tree by its fruit, and you who are penitent will bring forth works of repentance. I have often thought it was a very beautiful instance, showing the power of penitence which a pious minister once related. He had been preaching on penitence, and had in the course of his sermon spoke of the sin of stealing. On his way home a laborer came alongside of him, and the minister observed that he had something under his smock-frock. He told him he need not accompany him farther; but the man persisted. At last he said, "I have a spade under my arm which I stole up at that farm; I heard you preaching about the sin of stealing, and I must go and put it there again." That was sincere penitence which caused him to go back and replace the stolen article. It was like those South Sea Islanders, of whom we read who stole the missionaries' articles of apparel and furniture, and everything out of their houses; but when they were savingly converted they brought them all back. But many of you say you repent, yet nothing comes of it; it is not worth the snap of the finger. People sincerely repent, they say, that they should have committed a robbery, or that they have kept a gambling-house; but they are very careful that all the proceeds shall be laid out to their hearts' best comfort. True "repentance'' will yield works meet for repentance," it will be practical repentance.  
  
Yet farther. You may know whether your repentance is practical by this test. Does it last or does it not? Many of your repentances are like the hectic flush upon the cheek of the consumptive person which is no sign of health. Many a time have I seen a young man in a flow of newly acquired, but unsound godliness, and he has thought he was about to repent of his sins. For some hours such an one was deeply penitent before God, and for weeks he relinquishes his follies. He attends the house of prayer, and converses as a child of God. But back he goes to his sins as the dog returns to his vomit. The evil spirit has gone "back to his house, and has taken with him seven others more wicked than himself; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." How long has your penitence lasted? Did it continue for months? or did it come upon you and go away suddenly? You said, "I will join the church—I will do this, that, and the other, for God's cause." Are your works lasting? Do you believe your repentance will last six months? Will it continue for twelve months? Will it last until you are wrapped in your winding-sheet?  
  
Yet again, I must ask you one question more. Do you think you you'll repent of your sins if no punishment were placed before you? or do you repent because you know you shall be punished for ever if you remain in your sins? Suppose I tell you there is no hell at all; that, if you choose, you may swear; and, if you will, you may live without God. Suppose there were no reward for virtue, and no punishment for sin, which would you choose?. Can you honestly say, this morning, "I think, I know, by the grace of God, I would choose righteousness if there were no reward for it, if there were nothing to be gained by righteousness, and nothing to be lost by sin." Every sinner hates his sin when he comes near to the mouth of hell; every murderer hates his crime when he comes to the gallows; I never found a child hate its fault so much as when it was going to be punished for it. If you had no cause to dread the pit—if you knew that you might give up your life to sin, and that you might do so with impunity, would you still feel that you hated sin, and that you could not, would not, commit sin, except through the infirmity of the flesh? Would you still desire holiness? Would you still desire to live like Christ? If so—if you can say this in sincerity—if you thus turn to God and hate your sin with an everlasting hatred, you need not fear but that you have a "repentance" which is "unto life."  
  
III. Now comes the concluding and third point, and that "THE BLESSED BENEFICENCE OF GOD in granting to men "repentance unto life." "Repentance," my dear friends, is the gift of God. It is one of those spiritual favors which ensure eternal life. It is the marvel of divine mercy that it not only provides the way of salvation, that it not only invites men to receive grace, but that it positively makes men willing to be saved. God punished his Son Jesus Christ for our sins, and therein he provided salvation for all his lost children. He sends his minister; the minister bids men repent and believe, and he labors to bring them to God. They will not listen to the call, and they despise the minister. But then another messenger is sent, a heavenly ambassador who cannot fail. He summons men to repent and turn to God. Their thoughts are a little wayward, but after he, the Divine Spirit, pleads with them, they forget what manner of men they were, and they repent and turn. Now, what would we do if we had been treated as God was? If we had made a supper or a feast, and sent out messengers to invite the guests to come, what would we do? Do you think we should take the trouble to go round and visit them all, and get them to come? And when they sat down and said they could not eat would we open their mouths? If they still declared they could not eat, should we still make them eat? Ah! beloved, I am inclined to think you would not do so. If you had signed the letters of invitation, and the invited would not come to your feast, would you not say, "You shall not have it." But what does God do? He says, "Now I will make a feast, I will invite the people, and if they do not come in, my ministers shall go out and fetch them in bodily. I will say to my servants, go ye out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that they may partake of the feast I have prepared." Is it not a stupendous act of divine mercy that he actually makes them willing? He does not do it by force, but uses a sweet spiritual suasion. They are first as unwilling to be saved as they can be; "but," says God, "that is nothing, I have power to make you turn to me, and I will." The Holy Ghost then brings home the Word of God to the consciences of his children in so blessed a manner, that they can no longer refuse to love Jesus. Mark you, not by any force against the will, but by a sweet spiritual influence changing the will. O, ye lost and ruined sinners! stand here and admire my Master's mercy. He sets not only a feast of good things before men, but he induces them to come and partake of them, and constrains them to continue feasting until he carries them to the everlasting eternal mansion. And as he bears them up, he says to each one, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore, by my lovingkindness I have drawn thee. Now, dost thou love me?" "Oh, Lord," they cry, "thy grace in bringing us here proves that thou dost love us, for we were unwilling to go. Thou saidst, you shall go, we said we would not go, but thou hast made us go. And now, Lord, we bless thee, and love thee for that force. It was sweet constraint." I was a struggling captive, but I am now made willing.

Oh! sovereign grace, my heart subdue!  
I would be led in triumph too;  
A willing captive to my Lord  
To sing the honors of his Word."

Well now, what say you? Some of you will say, "Sir, I have been trying to repent for a long time. In pains and afflictions I have been praying and trying to believe, and doing all I can." I will tell you another thing: you will try a long time before you will be able to do it. That is not the way to get it. I heard of two gentlemen travelling. One of them said to the other, "I do not know how it is, but you always seem to recollect your wife and family, and all that is doing at home, and you seem as if you connected all things around you with them; but I try to bring mine to my recollection constantly, and yet I never can."; No," said the other, "that is the very reason—because you try. If you could connect them with every little circumstance ye meet, you would easily remember them. I think at such and such a time—now they are rising; at such and such a time—now they are at prayers; at such and such a time—now they are having their breakfast. In this way I have them still before me." I think the same thing happens with regard to "repentance." If a man says, "I want to believe," and tries by some mechanical means to work himself into repentance, it is an absurdity, and he will never accomplish it. But the way for him to repent is by God's grace to believe, to believe and think on Jesus. If he picture to himself the wounded bleeding side the crown of thorns, the tears of anguish—if he takes a vision of all that Christ suffered, I will be bound for it he will turn to him in repentance. I would stake what reputation I may have in spiritual things upon this—that a man cannot, under God's Holy Spirit, contemplate the cross of Christ without a broken heart. If it is not so, my heart is different from any one's else. I have never known a man who has thought upon, and taken a view of the cross, who has not found that it begat "repentance," and begat faith. We look at Jesus Christ if we would be saved, and we then say. "Amazing sacrifice! that Jesus thus died to save sinners." If you want faith, remember he gives it, if you want repentance, he gives it! if you want everlasting life, he gives it liberally. He can force you to feel your great sin, and cause you to repent by the sight of Calvary's cross, and the sound of the greatest, deepest death shriek, "Eloi! Eloi! lama sabacthani?" "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" That will beget "repentance;" it will make you weep and say, "Alas! and did my Savior bleed; and did my Sovereign die for me?" Then beloved, if you would have "repentance," this is my best advice to you—look to Jesus. And may the blessed Giver of all "repentance unto salvation" guard you from the false repentances which I have described, and give you that "repentance," which existeth unto life.

"Repent! the voice celestial cries,  
Nor longer dare delay;  
The wretch that scorns the mandate, dies,  
And meets a fiery day.

No more the sovereign eye of GOD  
O'erlooks the crimes of men;  
His heralds are despatch'd abroad  
To warn the world of sin.

The summons reach thro' all the earth  
Let earth attend and fear;  
Listen, ye men of royal birth,  
And let your vassals hear!

Together in his presence bow,  
And all your guilt confess  
Embrace the blessed Savior now,  
Nor trifle with his grace.

Bow, ere the awful trumpet sound,  
And call you to his bar:  
For mercy knows the appointed bound.  
And turns to vengeance there."