

Focus on Acts 11:1–18

WHAT is important to know?

— From “*Exegetical Perspective*,” Robert W. Wall

The church’s prior belief that Gentiles must be purified—by circumcision and Torah observance—to be initiated into the covenant-keeping community is now rewritten by divine revelation to include uncircumcised Gentiles. God’s plan is disclosed to Peter neither by kerygma nor by Scripture but by religious experience. His prior claim of divine impartiality (10:34) is learned by a series of timely revelations, climaxed by his observation that “God gave them the same *gift* that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ” (11:17; cf. 11:15b). Even though a nonproselyte Gentile, Cornelius evidently received blessings promised by God to Israel, including “the gift of the Spirit.”

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “*Theological Perspective*,” Lewis S. Mudge

Yet in every age we see human resistance to each new thing, including the gospel that “everything has become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Is there anything in the faith that does not change? If Peter’s preaching is the criterion, then the changeless elements are speaking the name of Jesus, bearing witness to his resurrection, and acknowledging the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. We may add to this the foundational principle recorded in Acts 11, where notions of clean and unclean as ways of separating people from one another are ruled antithetical to Christian faith forever, invalidating any attempt on our part to reinstate them, in any form, ever again.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “*Pastoral Perspective*,”

Joseph S. Harvard

More amazing than Peter’s vision and discernment was how the leaders in Jerusalem responded. They listened and were open to the new reality Peter envisioned. They could have said, “You are out of your mind, and this is wrong!” Instead, the Holy Spirit gave them the ability to listen and to change. As we go about our business in the church, the world is watching. Do we have anything to offer that differs from other groups characterized by dissension and division? Can we listen to each other and seek to discover where God’s Spirit is leading? Can we broaden the table so everyone has a place?

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “*Homiletical Perspective*,”

Stephen D. Jones

As followers of the rabbi from Nazareth whose primary teaching was through parables, we sometimes forget the power of stories today. We rarely tell our children the stories of how we have experienced God or how God changed our minds, redirected our paths, and opened new horizons for us. We do not tell the stories because we do not want to appear manipulative or better-than-thou or self-righteous. So we keep our stories to ourselves. This is not the message of Acts 11. If we would only learn to be storytellers and tell compelling stories, we could leave the rest up to the Spirit who takes up where stories end.