

The right way to handle disagreements

Acts 11:1-18



Strong personalities with strong opinions can lead to clashes!

News travels wide and fast.

Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.



No problem here it seems.

Gentiles also had received the word of God.
They believed and 'Life' had been given to them.

So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him,

Who are members of the 'circumcision party'?

All the men of the early congregations were circumcised Jewish believers (Samaritans and Ethiopian excepted).

It is the same root word "not to **discriminate**". That is what Peter heard in the vision. This group were doing to him what God had told Peter not to do with regard to the gentile believers!



Side one – the critics - the positives

the circumcision party criticized him,

There is nothing wrong with healthy criticism.
But it's not just what you say it's the way that you say it!

Peter was respected as an elder and an apostle but he wasn't to be treated as an idol.

Cf. Paul's criticised Peter over this very issue when Peter went back on these principals. Galatians 2:11.



Side one – the critics - the positives

saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

The traditions they had followed and sought to live by had been around for hundreds of years – it was the way things were done! So if a gentile man wanted to be fully part of God’s people, Israel, then he would be circumcised, take on the kosher food rules, observe the Sabbath etc. In other words he would convert to become a practising Jew.



They were zealous for the Law (perhaps converted Pharisees) and believed that the traditions should continue and that Gentiles should only be admitted to the church after circumcision.

Their case against Peter

saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

Saying ‘uncircumcised’ rather than ‘gentiles’ is strong, insulting and prejudiced language

Peter is accused of multiple offences

Mixing rather than separation.

Entering their home.

Eating non-kosher food.



Side one – the critics – the negatives

the circumcision party criticized him,



Perhaps there was the danger of a prideful zeal
ie a pride in performing rather than obeying.
Cf. the pharisee and tax collector, and Saul of
Tarsus.

These people were also genuine believers –
but we are all in danger of self-righteousness
which can make us come over as hyper-critical.



Side one – the critics – the negatives

the circumcision party criticized him,

They had heard what Peter had done. –he broke the rules.
BUT they had not heard and seen what God had told Peter.



Therefore they jumped to the conclusion that Peter had wilfully gone against their long held traditions.

This is the danger of assuming you know all the facts of the case.

Cf. the leaders' reply to Nicodemus in John 7:52

They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee."



Side two – Peter coping with criticism

Is it especially difficult when you know(believe) you are in the right?



What would you have done?

He was prepared

These six brothers also accompanied me, v12

He brought the 6 witnesses with him.

Was that simply God's over-ruling or also mature wisdom on Peter's part?

Deuteronomy 19:15 One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.



But Peter began and explained it to them **in order**:

He graciously explains how he came to the position where he was.

Note their good response

– they were prepared to listen

They gave him a fair hearing while he prepared to explain in detail.

He gave them enough information in order for them to understand.



We can see that in the following account Peter focuses on the details that clearly indicate God's part in it all.

He wants them to see that this was God doing a new thing and not simply Peter's idea.



“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me.

**Peter was engaged in
Spiritual Activities**

Praying

Seeing a Vision

Something appeared
from heaven



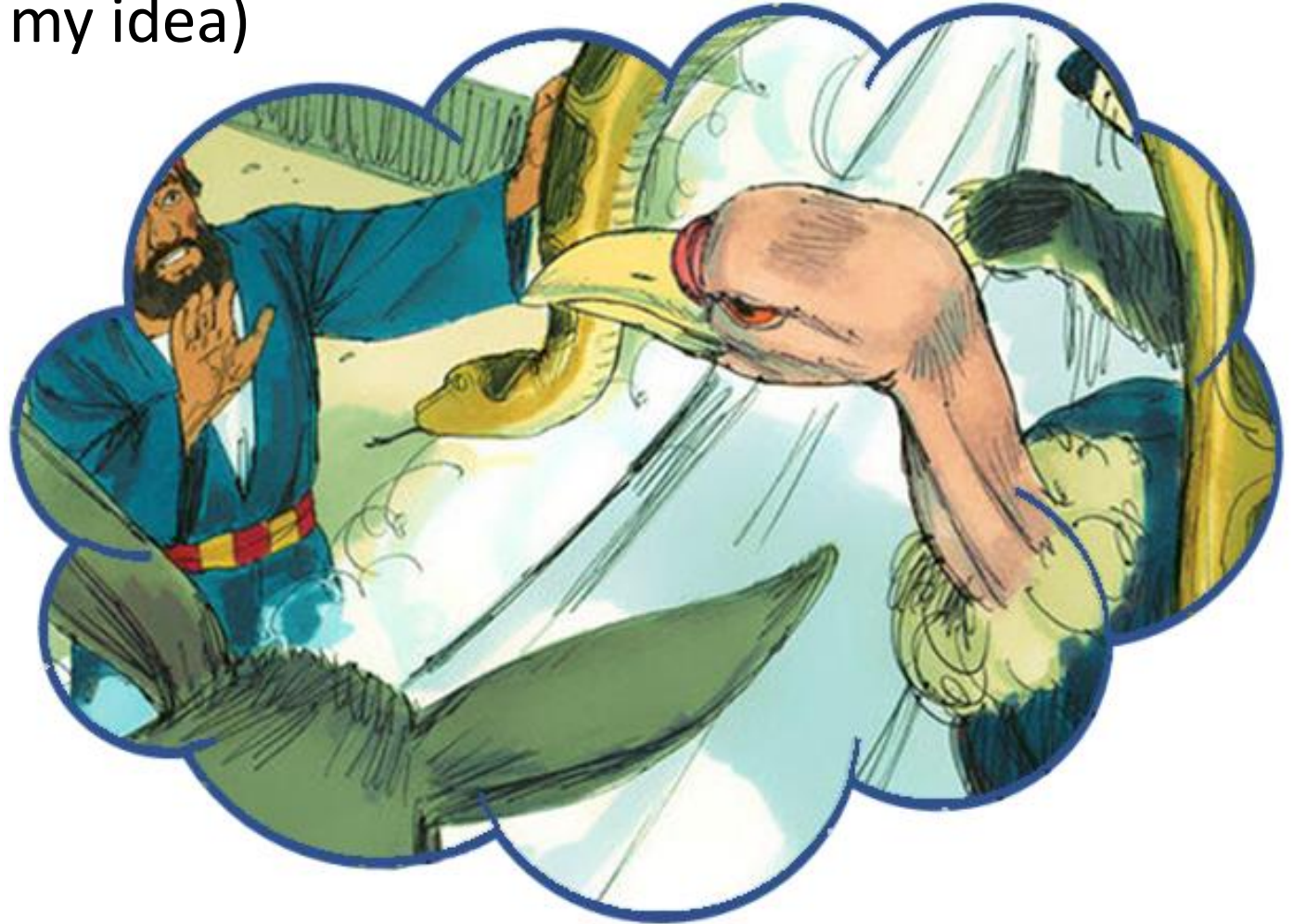
Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air.



And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'

God spoke

HE SAID this (It was not my idea)



I was just like you.

But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'

He had faithfully tried to live according to God's law.



But the voice answered a second time from heaven,

It was God speaking

God replied to what I said



‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’

The central message

At first Peter must have thought it was about animals and food. God reveals that things are changing. And shortly after God shows Peter it is about people.



Triple emphasis

This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven.

God was trying to tell me something!

And all these creatures went back to heaven!

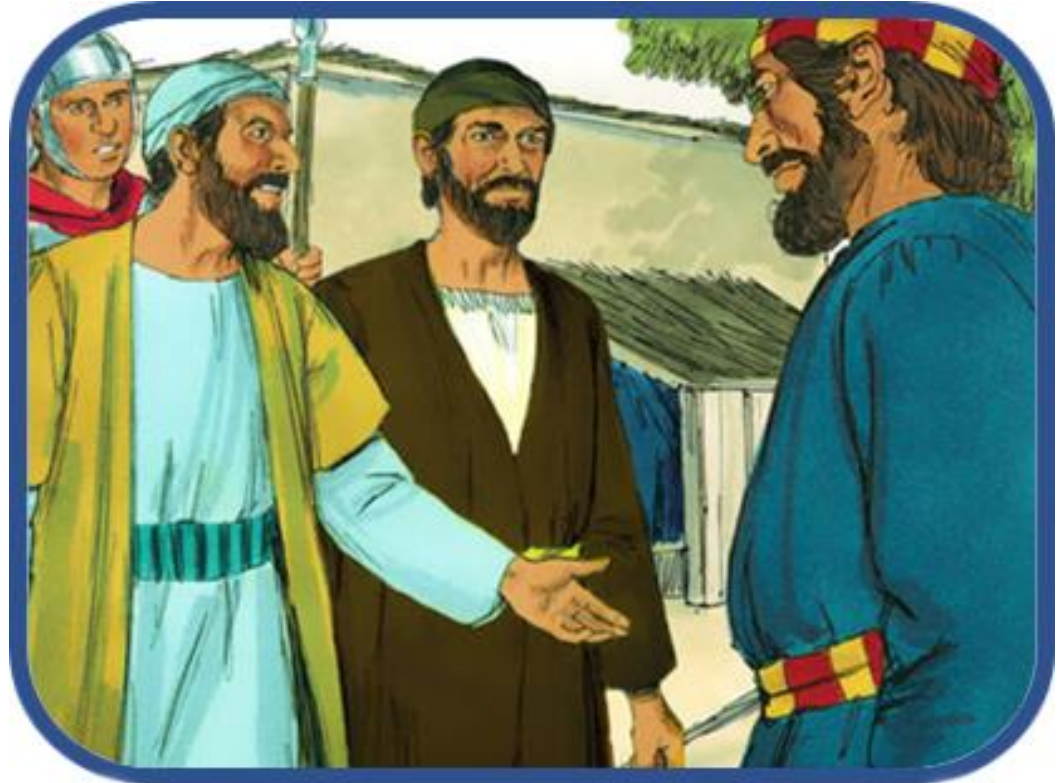
Slow to learn or a very important lesson?



And **behold**, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea.

The timing was no coincidence – God was at work

They came to our house – sent by angel message from God



And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction.

A very important point - the Spirit's guidance
The practical point – don't treat them differently
because they are gentile 'believers' (devout)



These six brothers also accompanied me,

Witnesses.

They can verify what happened next.



and we entered the man's house.

What you heard was true.

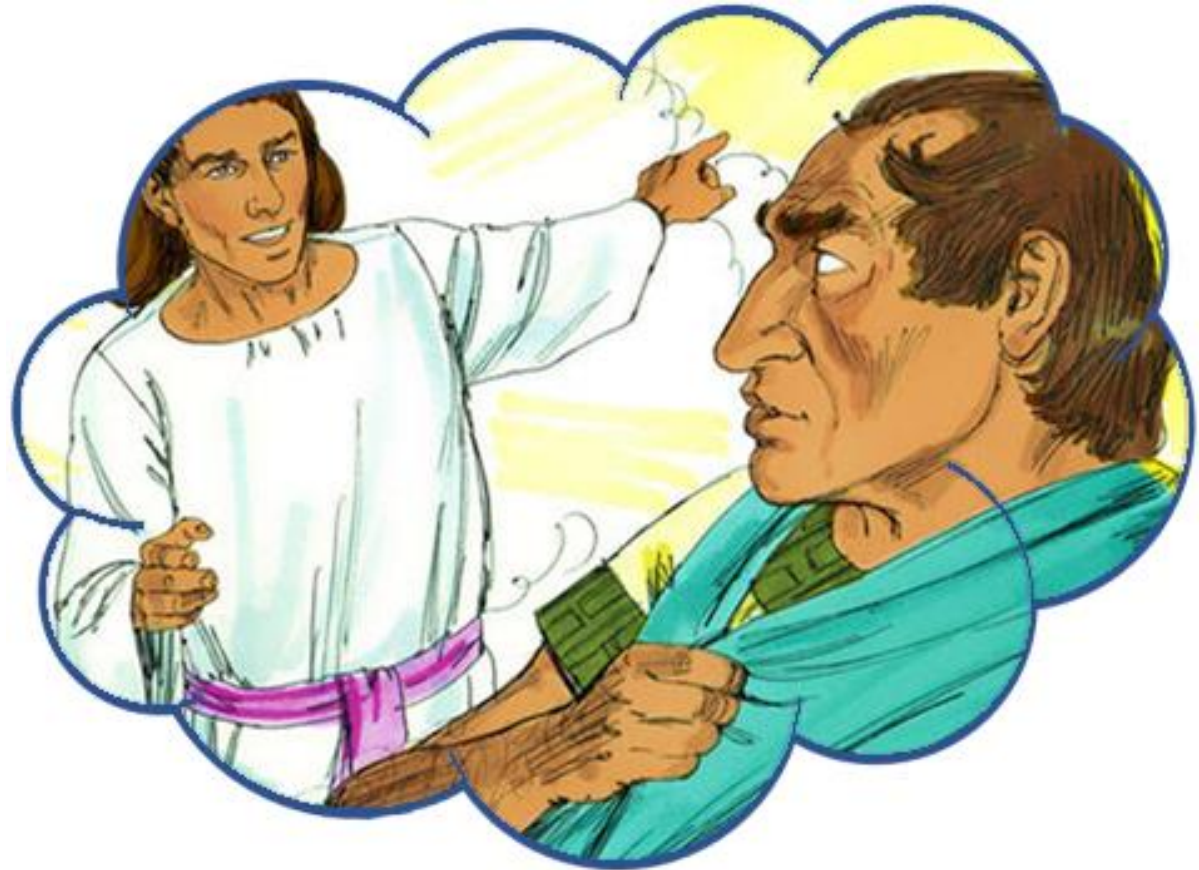
But now you can begin to see why.



And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house

An angel in there! - there was a message in the event

If the house was good enough
for an angel then



and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter;

Peter didn't choose this job



he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved,

It's about the gospel for a gentile man



you and all your household.'

And this gospel is for more people too.
This was the angelic message – not Peter's idea

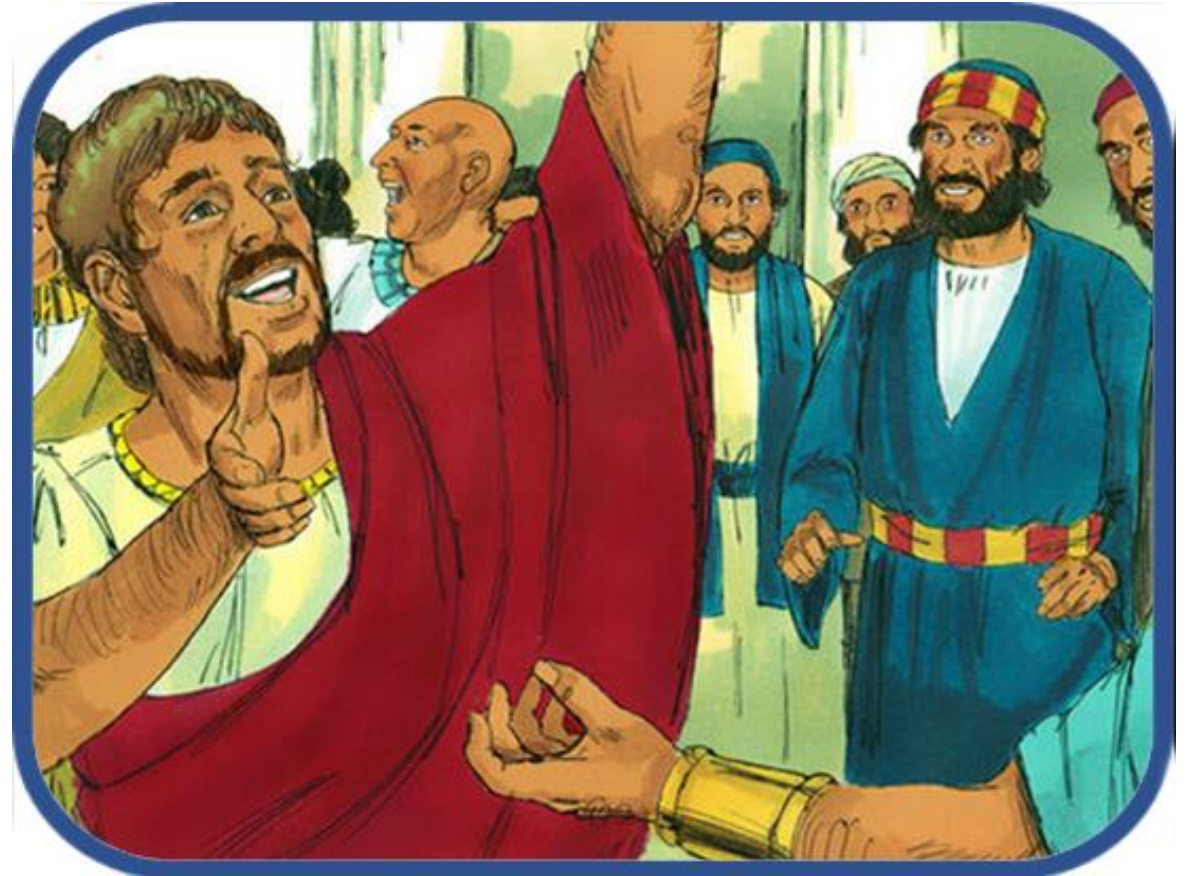


As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning.

God's blessing, a promise fulfilled and **confirmation** of their acceptance.

What were the visible and audible signs in this instance? – tongues , great joy .. Unlike Pentecost there were no tongues of fire or house-shaking wind.

But the Holy Spirit blessed them just like US (Jewish people) at Pentecost.



And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

Peter acted on Jesus' word.
(The Spirit brought to his mind the Master's words)

This was the sign of the new covenant blessing
– the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the believers.

The connection of water baptism and Spirit baptism
in Jesus' words led Peter to the next step.



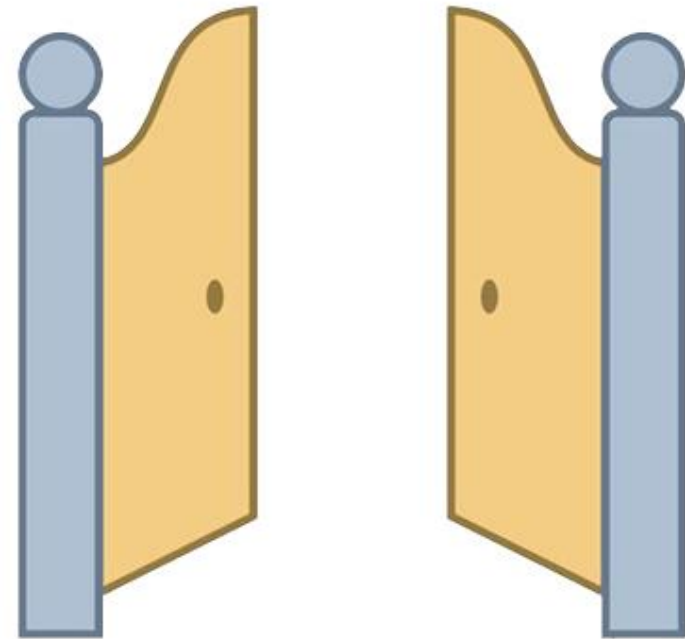
I could not stand in God's way

If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

God gave the same gift to THEM!

What is standing in the way?
Cf. the same term occurs with the
Ethiopian's baptism, and in Peter's vision
– **do not hesitate...**

Let God through!



The effect

When they heard these things they fell silent.

They had listened and heard.

They had nothing more to say by way of an objection.

It was the Lord's doing.



And they glorified God,

They had been persuaded about the truth of God's new dealings.

He has done something completely and gloriously unexpected.

In response? – heartfelt worship and praise.

Did they apologise, or was there no need? – their acceptance of God's will was enough.

It wasn't about winning or losing an argument.



saying, “Then to the Gentiles also
God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

Particularly after many centuries of gentile ridicule, opposition and persecution – it was not expected for them to be accepted this way. What made the difference was God’s gracious gift of repentance.

This leads to life –a full relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.



A Final Question

Why does Luke repeat so much of the account in chapter 10?



This message is really important:

As Jews or Gentiles we all come to a relationship with God on the same footing ... faith in the person and saving work of Jesus the Messiah.

The argument ended.



Psalm 133:1

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!