

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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Sermon title: “All” Includes Those Dirty, Rotten Gentiles, Acts 11

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**INTRODUCTION:** There are three points to my sermon today, and they are:

1. The Christian Jews criticized Peter’s association.
2. The Christian Jews listened to his revelation.
3. The Christian Jews rejoiced at Peter’s explanation.

**First, THE CHRISTIAN JEWS CRITICIZED PETER’S ASSOCIATION.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 11:1-2 <sup>1</sup>*The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.* <sup>2</sup>*So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him...*

**EXPLANATION:** It’s very difficult to give up old ways of thinking. The long time rule, for many generations, had been that Jews were not to socialize with Gentiles. The Gentiles were considered unclean.

**ILLUSTRATION:** In our own history, I was too young to remember the days of segregation in the US. When I started school, I did not know my first grade class was one of the first to be integrated. Black and white students were in my class. I had a black teacher, and she made it clear she wanted to be called black, not colored. She had all of us put our hands together, and she showed us that all of us had color.

I was only a little boy, and I lived in a neighborhood of all white people. I had never been around any people other than white people. But, at the age of six, I entered the Howard Elementary School in Gallatin, not knowing I was part of a huge experiment. As best as I recall, it all worked out OK.

Let me fast forward about 30 years. I was in south Alabama at a military training event. People of all colors were together in uniform. We all went out for supper wearing civilian clothes. While at the restaurant, I noticed an older man staring at me. It was uncomfortable. I said to a woman at the table, “Have you noticed that man staring?” She said “Of course, I am a black, and you are white, and we are in South Alabama.” When the man finished his meal, he got up, and as he walked around our table, he stared at us.

**APPLICATION:** My background led me to one way of thinking. His background led him to another way of thinking.

Each one of us were raised in a general, overall culture, and then each one of us was raised in a micro-culture, which was our family, our extended family, and our community. Values come from culture.

The question we must ask ourselves is whether an issue is moral or cultural? We might think something is a moral issue, and it is really just a cultural issue.

Or, even better, we must ask ourselves whether an issue is Christian or cultural. We might think something is a Christian issue when it is really a cultural issue.

For instance, a long time ago, every Baptist church I know of had Sunday worship at 11:00 AM. Then for some reason, churches started changing their worship times. I believe it happened when a Methodist converted to Baptist and told everyone how Methodists get to the restaurants before everyone else. And, the Pentecostals get out of church so late that the restaurants aren't crowded then either.

But, I remember people saying, “I don't know about this. I always grew up with the 11:00 AM time.” Now, there is no standard Baptist worship time.

Let's get back to the scripture: We thinking nothing of sitting at the table with a variety of people. We think nothing of going to a restaurant where we do not know the nationality of the cooks or the rest of the people eating.

But, in this day it was HUGE!

## **Second, THE CHRISTIAN JEWS LISTENED TO HIS REVELATION.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 11:3-10<sup>3</sup> *and [some of the Jews, the circumcised believers] said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”*

<sup>4</sup> *Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: <sup>5</sup> “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. <sup>6</sup> I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. <sup>7</sup> Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’*

<sup>8</sup> *“I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’*

<sup>9</sup> *“The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ <sup>10</sup> This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.*

**EXPLANATION:** It was considered a sin for Jews to socialize with Gentiles, and the idea of a Jew eating with a Gentile was unheard of.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A friend of mine was one of the first Americans to go Afghanistan. He found himself in the desert with a group of nomads. His mission was to negotiate the purchase of a lot of Toyotas for the allied forces. He described the ordeal like this: We were sitting around a campfire, and I was trying to win the favor of these nomads. Nearby were their camels and tents. When you negotiate with nomadic people, you don't just go up and ask for a transaction, you have to socialize. You've got to show interest in them as people. You've got to eat with them. I sat there that evening as the cook prepared food over an open fire. Not only did the food look disgusting, but the hands of the cook were filthy.

**EXPLANATION:** This is similar to how the Jews would have viewed Gentiles, their food, and their filthiness. They had rather starve than eat with Gentiles or the food of the Gentiles. They considered it a sin!

**APPLICATION:** In essence, here is what the Lord told Peter: *“I’ve changed my mind. That which was once a sin is no longer a sin.”* That’s hard to believe! Think of a sin, but don’t think about it too long, after all we are in church! Now, think of the Lord telling you that sin is no longer a sin! Your response would be: *“Surely not, Lord!”*

Now, let us reel this thought in as a church:

1. Let’s not let cultural hang-ups keep us from ministering to all people. I don’t have anything specific in mind here, so I came up with something. Let’s say a large factory moves into our area bringing thousands of new jobs and new people. Now let’s say the work week is Sunday through Thursday from 6 AM until 3 PM. If we wanted to reach those people, we’d have to have church at a different time. We’d have to consider their needs, including their family needs. Under the freedom we have in Christ, we would be free to do this.

2. Let’s not get locked into one way of doing church. I am happy with how we do church, but what we have here has grown over the centuries. This is very different than how Jesus did church. This is very different than how the early Church did church. Under the freedom we have in Christ, no two churches are required to look alike. No two churches are required to emphasize the same ministries.

3. Let’s make sure that no matter what we do, we keep the Gospel of Jesus Christ the center of what we do. I am happy with how we do church, but let’s not too locked into one way of doing it. Let’s not let cultural hang-ups drive us to irrelevance.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I’ve been thinking about what a new church member told me about her former church: The church closed because the young people moved away and the old people died. That’s a sad commentary indeed. It makes me think there was an underlying reason that drove the church to irrelevance.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I have friends in a church right now who tell me the church is about 25% of what it once was mainly because they cannot come to any agreement on their music style. Really? That is so childish, and I am afraid the future doesn’t look good for that church because of the lines drawn in the sand. In their

disagreements over relevance, they are driving themselves to irrelevance, and eventually, unless something happens, one day the doors will be closed.

### **Third, AND Last, THE CHRISTIAN JEWS REJOICED AT PETER'S EXPLANATION.**

Peter told about his visit to the home of Cornelius and tells what happened.

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 11:15-18 <sup>15</sup> *“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup> Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>17</sup> So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”*

<sup>18</sup> *When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”*

**EXPLANATION:** As Peter explained what happened, we must remember Peter was not just any old person. He had shown, over time, his maturity and wisdom. He became a great leader because he became a good follower—a follower of Jesus—that is. He had witnessed the miracles of Jesus and in Jesus’ name had worked miracles himself.

I must say, I love the scripture that says, “There were no further objections”!!!

He was a trusted leader, and when he spoke, people believed. No one questioned his dream because he gave them no reason to question his character or motives.

When he explained his dream, no one questioned his motives, because they knew he had a heart to reach people.

And, yes, now it was clear to them, the Gospel was really for all people, even those dirty, rotten Gentiles, which includes me and most people here today.

**APPLICATION:** Like Peter, let’s not get in God’s way! Let us all commit to not getting in God’s way. You’ll hear people say, *“Well, whatever happens will be*

*God's will.*” That is true only if God does not allow people to get in his way. But, right here when the scripture says Peter did not want to get in God's way, it makes it clear people can get in God's way. And, I've seen it happen. You may have seen it, too. I surely would not want to be in God's way, and I hope I have the insight to stay out of God's way.

Like the people, let's rejoice when God moves! Now, that sounds like a no-brainer, but not everyone rejoices when God moves. Think about it, these Jewish Christians were being told the way they once believed was no longer the way. That alone would cause someone to grumble at the next business meeting. Listen to me; this really was a game changer!

Like the people, let us focus on the heart of the Gospel: God has granted repentance that leads to life. Any other focus is a distraction. Heresies are distractions. Holding on to things that don't matter are distractions. Arguing over minutia is a distraction.

It's wonderful that at this point in the history of the world, God lessened or eliminated the ritualistic requirements to be his people, yet at the same time, broadened the family of faith!

Now, today we are free to focus on the heart of the Gospel, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, Name above all Names! It's Jesus, and nothing else.

Here is the result of God's work: growth, unity, and joy.

**CONCLUSION:** Here's the exam from today's sermon:

1. Are you locked into a way of thinking that is not really about the heart of the Gospel? I am sure this question could make someone really mad.
2. Do you allow the scripture to speak to you in a way that will reveal your hang-ups that have nothing to do with the heart of the Gospel?
3. Do you rejoice when the scripture reveals something new to you? When the blinders fall off, are you glad, or are you mad? Sometimes it's easier to proceed in ignorance!

As we come to our invitation, I think it's been made clear: The Gospel is for all people without exception. And, this includes you.

The Gospel is: Jesus came to save you from yourself, from your sin, and from an eternity in hell without him.

Let's pray: *Dear Lord, you are very clear to us in your word that all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Thank you for making the way clear. If there is a person who has trouble understanding, help that person, in this instant, to understand. Let that person call on you. Let that person surrender his or her will to you right now, at this point. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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