**The Rehearsal of the Reversal**

(Acts 11:1-18)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A musician who had just transferred in to a new orchestra arrived one day for his very first rehearsal—carrying some corn on the cob instead of a musical instrument. The conductor was naturally puzzled by this, but instead of asking him about it, he decided to let it go, and told someone to hand the new man his sheet music. Hearing that, the musician replied, “No thanks. I play *by ear.”*

Well, if you’re wondering why I’m talking about *rehearsals,* it’s because the Apostle Peter is about to do some rehearsing of his own:

**“And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.**

**“And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,**

**“Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.**

**“But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying” (Acts 11:1-4).**

Now before we get into the details of Peter’s rehearsal, I’d like to point out what Peter means when he declared that the Gentiles had “also” received the word of God (v.1). If you know your Bible, you know that at the time this was written *the Jews* had been receiving the Word of God for the past 1500 years, going all the way back to Abraham in Genesis 12. But in Acts 10, God sent Peter to a Gentile named Cornelius, so now they too began to receive the Word.

Now you’d *think* that the Jewish brethren mentioned in the first verse of our text would have been happy about that Peter had brought God’s Word to the Gentiles—*especially* the eleven other “apostles” Luke references there. Instead, verse 2 says they “contended” with him. In other words, they gave him grief about it!

Now here you might be thinking, “Just who do those Jews think they are that they can question the great apostle Peter? I mean, even the other eleven apostles weren’t showing him the respect he deserved as the leader of the twelve.”But if that’s what you’re thinking, I can assure you that they were *right* to take Peter to task about sharing the Word of God with Gentiles. You see, they knew that Gentiles weren’t *supposed* to receive God’s Word until something else happened—something Peter mentioned earlier in Acts:

**“Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, *And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.* Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away *every one of you* from his iniquities” (Acts 3:25,26).**

As you can see, all the Gentile kindreds of the earth weren’t supposed to be blessed with things like the Word of God until “every one” of the Jews had been turned from his iniquities. So when Peter went to the Gentiles *before* that, the Jewish brethren and the other apostles were *right* to ask Peter where he got off doing things out of the order prescribed by God Himself in His Word.

Now is there anything you can learn from that? Don’t ever think you shouldn’t question some high-falutin’ religious leader just because he *is* a high-falutin’ religious leader! There’s plenty of Bible teachers out there who don’t know what *you* know about God’s Word if you know how to rightly divide it! Many a Baptist pastor and many a Pentecostal preacher has come to understand the distinctiveness of Paul’s apostleship and message from grace believers just like you who weren’t afraid to question spiritual leaders.

*And* don’t ever be shy about calling *grace* pastors out on the carpet if they say something that doesn’t square with what the Word teaches. About twenty years ago, I said something in a message that caused one of the ladies in my church to ask about what I’d said. Her question caused me to rethink my position on whether or not Old Testament Jewish saints had eternal security. And after I’d restudied the matter, I changed my position to the *right* position, that they do!

Remember, our apostle Paul says that “the pillar and ground of the truth”in the present dispensation of grace is “the church” (I Tim.3:15), not the pastor. So if you hear me or any other grace pastor or teacher say something that doesn’t line up with the Scriptures, do what those Jewish brethren did in verse 2 of our text and *contend* with us.

*Especially* if we’re talking about something *serious—*and we know those brethren thought that this matter *was* serious, for that word “contended” is only used in matters of grave concern. For instance, when Nehemiah heard that the Jews in his day forsook the temple, he wrote:

**“Then *contended* I with the rulers, and said, *Why is the house of God forsaken?* And I gathered them together, *and set them in their place”* (Nehemiah 13:11).**

Isn’t it interesting how many modern figures of speech and expressions find their roots in the Bible? Even today we talk about putting someone in their place when they get out of line!

But that wasn’t the only time that Nehemiah had to contend with his brethren in serious matters. When he heard that some of the Jews had put God’s sabbath on the pay-no-mind list, he wasn’t about to let them get away with that:

**“Then I *contended* with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, *and profane the sabbath day?”* (Nehemiah 13:17).**

And when some of Nehemiah’s countrymen in Israel intermarried with the Gentiles, he wrote,

**“I *contended* with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, *Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves”* (Nehemiah 13:25).**

That ol’ boy *whooped up* on them, for they had transgressed in yet another serious area of obedience to God’s Word.

So when Acts 11:2 uses that same word to describe how Peter’s Jewish brethren “contended” with him, that shows you how serious it was for Peter to go to the Gentiles before God had turned every one of the Jews away from his iniquities.

At least they *thought* it was a serious thing! You see, they didn’t know that *God* had sent Peter to Cornelius. They had no clue that God was reversing His policy of not allowing Jews to fraternize with Gentiles—but they were about to find out about it from Peter’s rehearsal of the reversal.

Now when we think of the word *rehearsal,* we usually think of the kind we talked about in our opening story, the kind an orchestra has before a concert. But the first definition of the word in my dictionary just means to *repeat* something, as we see in I Samuel 17:31:

**“And when the words were heard which David spake, they *rehearsed them* before Saul…”**

See how that verse defines the word “rehearsed”as *repeated?* Well, as we’re about to see, Peter is going to carefully repeat everything God said to him when He sent him to Cornelius. And when Verse 4 says that Peter “expounded” what had happened during his visit, that means he *explained* it, as we see when Mark said of the Lord Jesus,

**“…without a parable spake He not unto them: and when they were alone, he *expounded* all things to his disciples” (Mark 4:34).**

During the Lord’s public ministry, He taught the people in parables, then *explained* those parables to the twelve apostles in private.

So when Peter’s Jewish brethren asked Peter to explain himself, *he did—*by expounding what had happened when he went to call on a Gentile. And when Verse 4 adds that he was about to explain it *in order,* that means Peter was fixing to give them a step-by-step rehearsal of the reversal.

And the reasonthe Bible *records* Peter’s exposition of his expedition to share the Word with Gentiles is that this was a *momentous* event in the Book of Acts, and God does not want us to read about it in Chapter 10 and then forget about it. This is similar to how the conversion of Saul of Tarsus was such a momentous event that the Book of Acts records it three times.

But because Peter will be repeating so much of what we studied in Chapter 10, we won’t have to comment too much on these verses in Chapter 11. That will enable us to cover a full eighteen verses in our text in this lesson, beginning with:

**“I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:**

**“Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.**

**“And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.**

**“But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth” (Acts 11:5-8).**

Now you gotta hand it to Peter here. When God told him to do something that his Bible said he shouldn’t do, Peter tried to put *God Himself* on the pay-no-mind list, saying, as it were, “Nothing doing!”

And when he declared that nothing common or unclean had ever entered his mouth, does that tell you anything about how *dedicated* he was when it came to keeping God’s laws? I mean, if God told *me* I couldn’t “eat” bacon, I’d probably bite some off and chew it and spit it out! Or maybe just let it melt in my mouth for a little while—kind of like when Bill Clinton was running for president and someone said they saw him smoke pot in college, and he said he did *but he didn’t inhale.*

If I were Peter, I would not only have *inhaled* the aroma of bacon frying in the morning, I’d have allowed some to enter my mouth and sucked on it like a “slo-poke sucker.” Remember those? We used to call them “all day suckers” because that’s about how long they took to consume! That’s what I would have done with tasty forbidden foods like bacon and crab—I just would have made sure I never *swallowed,* and maintained the letter of the law in that way. But Peter knew that violating the *spirit* of the law like that would be too much temptation to overcome, so he made sure that nothing unclean ever passed his lips.

Now is there anything you can learn from that about resisting the temptation to sin? If you have trouble with covetousness, for example, don’t spend your time leafing through magazines that feature cars and houses and boats that you can’t afford to buy. Do you know what that is? That’s just inhaling the scent of covetousness!

If you have trouble obeying the government, like our Apostle Paul says we should (Rom. 13:1-6; Titus 3:1,2), just turn off the television news, for neither Fox nor CNN has any respect for those who are in authority over us in government if they don’t agree with their particular political persuasion. And that goes for whatever political voodoo guru you may watch on the internet as well! Watching those guys run down the leaders that Paul says we should be *praying* for is just sucking on the slo-poke sucker of *lawlessness.* And because society loves to do so, we’re going to continue to see more and more disrespect for law and order in our society as respect for authority continues to devolve.

Do you know what your apostle says about resisting temptation?

**“…*make not provision for the flesh,* to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14).**

If you’re not sure what that means, it means if you’re having trouble with pornography—and I’ve talked to even *grace* men who do—and your drive home from work takes you past an adult book store, you might want to to take the road that takes you past the Krispy Kreme store instead. Of course, that’ll open you up to a whole *new* kind of temptation!

Well, in replying to God’s command to eat unclean things with a curt “thanks, but no thanks,” Peter was standing firmly on the Word of God. But—as he found out—the Word of God was *changing.* As he put it:

**“But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 11:9).**

Now as we saw in our last study, what God was doing here was introducing Peter to the dispensational change He made in Acts 9 when He cleansed *the Gentiles,* and saved Paul and *sent him* to the Gentiles, a change that he accepted. Of course, when *you* try to introduce a believer to dispensational change, how many times have you heard these verses quoted?

**“…I am the LORD, *I change not…”* (Malachi 3:6).**

**“…Jesus Christ *the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever”* (Hebrews 13:8).**

I’m guessing you’ve probably heard those verses quoted fairly often when you try to convince a believer that God’s rules change sometimes. The next time it happens, remember that Acts 10 is one of the places you can take them to show that while God Himself never changes, *His rules* change fairly frequently in Scripture.

Not *all* His rules, of course. Some of God’s rules don’t change because they are based on the unalterable principles of morality and righteousness. It’s always wrong to lie or steal or kill, for example, so it’s *immoral* to do those things.

But it’s *not* morally wrong in the dispensation of grace to work on the sabbath day. In fact, the only reason it was *ever* wrong was because God said it was! He made a temporary *artificial* rule to typify how someday His people would be able to rest in the Christ who said,

**“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you *rest*” (Matthew 11:28).**

That’s one of the reasons Paul tells us that “we are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom.6:15). Of course, he repeats nine of the ten commandments, the ones that are rooted in morality and righteousness. But it is highly significant that he *doesn’t* repeat the law’s command to rest on the seventh day.

But if you’ve ever tried to share Romans 6:15 with a friend of the 7th Day Adventist persuasion, you know that they insist that the sabbath should be observed today because God rested on the seventh day in Genesis 1, long before the law was given by Moses. That’s true, but did you know that no one before the law was ever told to *keep* the sabbath? We know this to be the case, for Nehemiah once prayed to God, saying:

**“Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And *madest known unto them* Thy holy sabbath” (Nehemiah 9:13,14).**

That phrase *“madest known”* means that while people were familiar with the concept of resting on the seventh day from the story of creation that was passed down orally from generation to generation, no one knew that theywere supposed to *keep* the sabbath until God gave the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. And you’re not under that law, so you’re not breaking God’s law if you work on Saturday, or Sunday, or whatever day you think the sabbath might be!

And you’re not breaking any of God’s laws if you decide to eat crab or ham or any other food that the law forbids, for those laws are *also* artificial non-moral laws that God changed. So I agree with a Covid-19 meme I saw on the internet the other day that said, “Please keep a social distance—*from my bacon!”*

You wouldn’t have to tell me *twice* to eat bacon, but God had to tell Peter *three times!*

**“And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven” (Acts 11:10).**

Now in case you forgot the *reason* this was done three times, Peter explains it as he continued his exposition in Verse 11:

**“And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me.”**

God told Peter that unclean animals were no longer unclean *three times* so he’d be sure to get the connection that *the Gentiles* were no longer unclean when *three* Gentiles came knocking on his door moments after seeing that revolutionary vision. But just in case he missed the connection, the Holy Ghost spoke up to drive it home, as Peter rehearsed in the next verse of our text:

**“And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house.**

**“And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;**

**“Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.”**

Now this last verse answers a question that I’m often asked; and that is: Was Cornelius saved into Israel’s kingdom program or into the Body of Christ? I mean, he was a fisherman. Are we going to be able to trade fish stories with him in heaven someday, or will he be down here swapping fish stories with Jonah in the kingdom of heaven on earth? Jonah would win, by the way!

Well, I can assure you that the only words of salvation that Peter knew were the words he spoke in Acts 2:38, where he affirmed that men had to be baptized with water to be saved. And whenever that message was believed, the one who responded to it became a member of the kingdom church.

But something happened before Peter could *tell* Cornelius those kingdom program terms of salvation, something we read about in Verse 15:

**“And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.”**

Now when it says that the Holy Ghost fell on those Gentiles as Peter “began” to speak—let me ask you: is that how it happened? Go back and review the account in Acts 10 and you’ll find that Peter spoke *225 words* before the Spirit fell on them. Does that sound like the *beginning* of his speech to you?

Did you ever hear the old joke about how we don’t know who wrote the book of Hebrews, but we know that it must have been a woman, for only a woman would call *thirteen chapters* a “few words” (Heb.13:22)!

But Peter was no woman, so how can he say he only *began* to speak after uttering 225 words? You say, “Maybe that’s just how the Bible talks,” but no, it’s not! I could give several Bible examples, but when the Lord raised a man from the dead and “he that was dead sat up, *and began to speak”* (Luke 7:15), do you really think the dead guy spoke 225 words *before* the Lord raised him and he began to speak?

No, of course not! And when it says Peter began to speak after he already uttered 225 words, it means that that’s when he began to speak *the words of the gospel,* and tell them that the kingdom program required water baptism for salvation!

Now the *reason* God gave those Gentiles the Spirit before they were baptized was to teach Peter that the times they were a-changing, as Bob Dylan once sang. And that, quite frankly, was something that made absolutely no sense at all to poor Peter! So he did what you should do when things don’t make sense in *your* life. Verse 16 goes on to say:

**“Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.”**

When things in Peter’s life just weren’t adding up, he tried to remember *verses of Scripture* that applied to what was going on. And if you’ll do the same, it’ll help you just like it helped him.

How did it help him? Well, follow me for a minute.

Do you remember what *Paul* did when people were trying to figure out why *he* was preaching to Gentiles before every one of the Jews had their iniquities taken away? He explained

**“…that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision…*that the Gentiles might glorify God* for His mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee *among the Gentiles*…And again he saith, Rejoice, *ye Gentiles*…And again, Praise the Lord, *all ye Gentiles*…And again…There shall be a root of Jesse…that shall rise to reign *over the Gentiles;* in Him shall *the Gentiles* trust” (Romans 15:8-12).**

The reason Christ was made a minister to the Jews was “that” the Gentiles might rejoice when God usedthe Jews to reach them.But that wasn’t the way it was happening! God was reaching the Gentiles *through Paul* instead. But it was happening, so who cares *how* it was happening?

Well, Peter remembered that the Lord had said the reason men should be baptized with water was so they could get the Holy Spirit. That wasn’t the way it happened with those Gentiles. They got the Spirit *without* water baptism. But it happened, so who cares *how* it happened? And thinking about that comforted Peter with God’s Word when God didn’t seem to be following His own Word!

After sharing those words with his Jewish brethren, Peter reached the conclusion of his rehearsal in verse 17:

**“Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?”**

Peter told his brethren, as it were, “I couldn’t withstand what God did in saving those Gentiles without water baptism, so I baptized them anyway!” And do you know what? His brethren were *satisfied* with his rehearsal of God’s rehearsal, as we see in the last verse of our text:

**“When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).**

Now this is the way that believers are *supposed* to act when they learn that God has made a dispensational change! But compare that to what happened later when Paul told some *unsaved* Jews that God had granted repentance to life to Gentiles. In speaking of the Lord and how He sent him to the Gentiles, we read:

**“…He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience *unto this word,* and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live” (Acts 22:21,22).**

When Paul told those *unsaved* Jews about God’s dispensational change, they didn’t glorify God, they wanted to kill him instead!

Do you know what that means? It means that when you try to tell believers that God changed the program from law to grace in the present dispensation, and they don’t glorify God, they might be saved but they’re *acting* like *unsaved* men! In the Bible, believers were always open to dispensational change. It was one of the signs that they *were* believers.

But before you decide to sit there smugly and think, “What’s wrong with those 7th Day Adventists? Why are they acting like unsaved men in refusing to see the dispensational change God made when He said that we’re not under the law of the sabbath, or the law that says you can order a BLT as long as you hold the “B”! Because before you think that, you better be sure that *you yourself* aren’t acting like unsaved men by lying, stealing, lusting after your neighbor’s wife, or coveting his Harley Davidson!

Later we’ll see those same unsaved Jews try to tell the new Gentile members of the Body of Christ that they had to keep the law to be saved. You know. The way Adventists and Lordship Salvation brethren do today!

But if you’re not saved, you don’t have to pass on eating at Joe’s Crab House, a world-famous eatery in Chicago, in order to be saved. You just have to know that salvation is God’s *gift* (Rom.6:23), a gift you can’t pay for by following rules like that. It’s a gift that *Christ* paid for with His blood. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).