

Title: PETER CALLED TO ACCOUNT, ACTS 11:1-18
(Chatham, NJ; 04/24/16, AM) [D – Narrative Analysis; Twin-Point Outline]

Theme: Peter's experience at Cornelius' house became a flashpoint of controversy for him, but it also became a watershed event that changed society's thinking about truth, religion, and equality.

Purpose: To examine the episode when Peter is called to defend himself and to discuss the principles that still affect us in the twenty-first century.

Introduction:

1. We continue with episodes in the life of Peter.
2. His ministry and influence have grown since John 21.
3. In chapter eleven Peter endures criticism for his actions at the home of a Gentile.
4. The momentous occasion of Cornelius' conversion, though criticized by his brethren, began a new era in history with numerous implications.

I. Peter in Hot Water

A. The critics and their case against him

1. "You ate with Gentiles," 3
2. Peter admitted his discomfort to Cornelius, 10:28
3. More than a minor issue: his critics viewed the issue as a matter of holiness
4. Eating with them indicated defilement
5. The problem of the Gentiles and the Law does not go away easily: chapter fifteen brings the dispute into full focus
6. The "circumcision group" let the Gentiles in but there was still the issue of keeping the Law

B. Peter's Defense

1. Peter must have been disappointed that his effort met with criticism rather than enthusiasm and joy
2. He offers no reasoned, theological argument based on interpretation of the Law
3. His critics could have easily countered those with their own arguments
4. His defense rests entirely on two things:
 - One, the vision where God challenges him not to call unclean what God has cleansed, 10:15; 11:9
 - Two, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on them
 - Conclusion: how could I stand in God's way?
5. They had no argument, 11:18
6. God had spoken: the Gentiles are in

C. A New Era for the church and the Great Commission

1. God granted even the Gentiles "repentance that leads to life," 11:18
2. This change in thinking was not unlike Paul's dramatic change: it shook the foundations of the circumcision group
3. The Great Commission could now be interpreted expansively: "Make disciples of all nations."
4. The episode also emboldens the disciples at Antioch
5. NOTE: this was grassroots evangelism; the Apostles played no role in speaking to the Gentiles (11:19)
6. A great number came to faith and Antioch eventually became the church that originated Paul's missionary journeys
7. Truly a new era had begun

II. Far Reaching Implications for Us

- A. Holiness is not about ritual purity, celebrating holydays, or dietary restrictions
 - 1. For those who clung to the Law, these things had become the supreme habits of a holy person; they misjudged their importance often neglecting more essential matters of the Law, Mt. 23:23
 - 2. Jesus had taught that defilement came from within the heart not from the outside and he had declared all foods clean in the same breath, Mk. 7:17-23
 - 3. Some religious-appearing activities do nothing to control the indulgence of the flesh, Col. 2:16-23
 - 4. Peter had to be reminded of this the hard way; Gal. 2:14-16
 - 5. All are justified by faith

- B. God's truth is truth for all people
 - 1. The Jewish Messiah was always meant to be humanity's Messiah
 - 2. Paul makes this abundantly clear to the Greeks in Athens, Acts 17:30
 - 3. The Gospel was not limited to a time, place, or a chosen few

- C. God treats all men without partiality
 - 1. Peter learned it by this experience, Acts 10:34
 - 2. For all the faults of Christians, it has been Christian teachings that have given rise to any notion of the dignity and worth of all people
 - 3. Christ's teachings extend even beyond this
 - 4. Eugene Genovese, an former Marxist history professor, was awakened to the errors of his philosophy because of the violence that accompanied Marxist states (more people were killed in Cambodia than in the entire Viet Nam conflict)
 - 5. He asked a relevant question, ". . . where outside the Christian West did concepts of personal freedom and limits to state authority arise and flourish" (*Dissent* 388)?
 - 6. Freedom, human dignity, and equality are all things that arose out of what God was doing by making the Gospel available to all nations

Conclusions:

- 1. The Jew/Gentile controversy had consequences beyond the immediate issue.
- 2. We are the beneficiaries of what the Holy Spirit did not only at Cornelius' house but also what He did to help the church resolve the eventual conflict over it.
- 3. God's plan had always been to unite everything under Christ, Ephesians 1:10.
- 4. We all have the privilege of access to God, Eph. 2:18-19, and are fellow citizens of the Kingdom.
- 5. Let our love and brotherhood bring many more to His saving grace.
- 6. We invite you to share this repentance unto life today.