



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

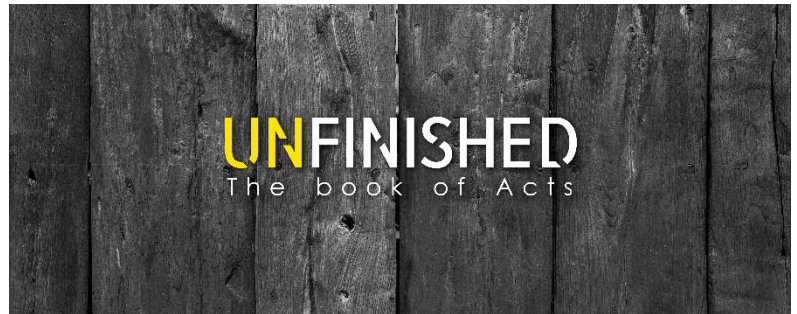
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Unfinished

Part 20: An Attitude Adjustment

Acts 11:1–18

Tim Badal | April 8, 2018



We've been in a series in Acts we've titled "Unfinished." If you aren't very aware of the Bible, the book of Acts is the story of what takes place after Jesus' death, burial and resurrection through the ministry of His disciples. We've been learning the great things God did through these men, and now, 2,000 years later, we are a byproduct of the unfinished work God started in those early days. We who are now also followers of Christ are to take up the mantle to continue their ministry in our areas of influence. We too are to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to a world that needs Him.

The disciples began as 120 people in an upper room. They were bewildered and fearful of what the future was going to bring. But then through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, by the time we've reach Acts 10 and 11, we've learn that the group was now numbering in the tens of thousands. The church that began in Jerusalem has now multiplied into Judea and Samaria, the areas surrounding Jerusalem, and even spreading to the "uttermost parts of the world." We also read that they began as a Jewish-only group, but recently we've seen that they now include Gentiles, who are non-Jewish people.

This growth didn't take place without any struggle. In Acts 5 we read about the problem with Ananias and Sapphira, who sinned against the Lord by lying about what they had given to the church. God dealt with them in a swift and just way. We also read in Acts 6 about some of the logistical issues that came with growth, as some of the widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.

Both of these things paled, however, in comparison to what we read about in Acts 7. Stephen, one of Christ's followers, was preaching the gospel. Up to this point, some of the believers had been mocked or rejected, but this time was different. While he was sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, the people became angry. Under the oversight of a man named Saul of Tarsus, Stephen was stoned for his faith.

After that, we're told in Acts 8 that a great persecution broke out against the church. Saul began going door to door, hunting down believers, because he hated the way of Christianity. That continued for some time, and God used this persecution to scatter the church into far-off places so more people could learn of the gospel.

But then in Acts 9, as Saul was hunting down the church, he met Jesus Christ face to face. He was blinded by the glory of Christ and came to a saving knowledge of Jesus. Next fall we'll learn about the rest of the story of Saul as he became Paul the Apostle.

Then in Acts 10, something amazing takes place. Peter gets a vision from the Lord, indicating that God has opened the door, not just to the Jewish people, but for the Gentiles to also become followers of Jesus. An angel comes to Peter and tells him there's a Roman centurion named Cornelius who is a God-fearing man but who needs to hear the gospel. Peter is to go to this man's house to tell him about Jesus so he can come to a saving faith. As a result, a whole household of Roman citizens—a military family—comes to know Jesus as Lord and is filled with the Holy Spirit.

Even though you think everybody would be excited about this, when Peter returns to Jerusalem, no one is pleased with his report. They don't like what God has had Peter do. Today we're going to learn about what it means to have an attitude adjustment. Quite frankly, there are times when we need to have our thoughts and perspectives examined and repurposed so God can do a greater work in and through us. So we'll be looking at Acts 11:1–18. Let's see what's going on next.

Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ³ “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” ⁴ But Peter began and explained it to them in order: ⁵ “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. ⁶ Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. ⁷ And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ ⁸ But I said, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹ But the voice answered a second time from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’ ¹⁰ This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹ And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’ ¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ 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?” ¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

When I was a young boy, there was a phrase that struck fear in my heart. It signified an event that would inevitably take place. I would be at school and no matter how good a day I was having, the teacher would say something that would bring me to despair. Those three words? “Parent-teacher conference.” The problem at our school was it wasn't just a parent and teacher conference—I had to be there as well. I remember one teacher I had in elementary school whom I was struggling with. My free spirit had gotten the best of me a couple times—well, maybe a bunch of times. I knew who I was. But now my parents were about to be brought into it and what I had done would be rehearsed with them. I was filled with despair.

So one of these days came and we were waiting in the hallway. I can still remember the student and his family who went before our family. They came out of the office looking as though everyone was filled with pride and joy. “Oh, Junior, you've been such a good boy! Look at these great grades.” I remember the teacher saying, “All right, Badals, come on in.” I felt like a dictator about to go on trial for war crimes.

We walked in and sat down. It started out bad and went downhill from there. My mom cried. We just sat there and endured it. My dad hadn't said a word, which was not normal for him. The only thing I heard him say, after all the crimes against humanity had been shared, was, “Hey, don't worry about it. It's Friday, and by Monday Tim will be a new man. That's because this weekend, Tim is going to get an attitude adjustment.”

I'm telling this because I know some of you need to have hope that your kid will turn out okay. Maybe they'll end up being a pastor one day.

Now I was pretty young, but when it came to attitudes, I thought they resided somewhere between your heart and head. I didn't know what my backside had to do with that, but it's amazing what a swift kick to the behind can do to your heart and head. My dad made it very clear that my attitude, outlook and vision as a student was going to change dramatically—because it had to. Dad knew that if something didn't change, I would never graduate. I would never become a capable employee or citizen in my world. Thankfully I can say something did change.

As Christians, we too need attitude adjustments from time to time. At times our thinking or perspectives grow stale. Sometimes it's more about us than it is about God. Sometimes it's more about our preferences and prerogatives than it is about God and His plan. When this happens, like a good heavenly Father, God comes to us and says, “You need an attitude adjustment.”

Luke tells us in Acts 11 that the early church needed an attitude adjustment. To be sure, God was already doing great things and the church had been faithfully following His vision. Jesus had told them to make disciples in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world (Matthew 28:16–20). We can see how this was taking place a step at a time. Not that it was always done voluntarily; it required persecution to prompt them to leave Jerusalem. But even in the times of persecution, they were faithful to spread the gospel wherever they were.

Up until this point, the pursuit of the Great Commission had been limited to the Jews. Yes, they had to move away from the rules of Judaism to embrace Christ. Still, no one had gone outside the Jewish community in their ministering. They didn't pay attention to the other people—the Samaritans and the other “Gentile dogs.” They assumed the gospel was only for those who were in the line of Jewish tradition.

As a result, God was now going to give His people an attitude adjustment. He wanted to refocus their thinking so they would come to understand that the gospel needed to go beyond the world of the Jews. He wanted them to know it was for all peoples in the

world. Last week we saw how Peter learned the lesson that God does not show partiality, that He loves Jew and Gentile alike, and that Christ's atonement is for everyone who would believe.

Today we see Peter coming back from watching Gentiles receive the same experiences from God that the early followers had received at Pentecost. They had come to believe in Christ, they had spoken in tongues, and they had been baptized and filled with the Spirit. But when he got to Jerusalem, his report was not applauded, but rather was criticized. So today we're going to look at three elements of the attitude adjustment God had for them—and for us perhaps as well. We too need to ask, "Am I working in a way that continues to advance the Kingdom of God?"

Our text responds to some wrong attitudes by defining what real Christianity is.

The first attitude of ours that may need adjusting is our understanding of what Christianity actually is. Sometimes when God starts changing things in our lives, our true attitudes begin to show themselves. Over the last few weeks we've made some major changes here at Village Bible Church—crazy, innovative changes. We've painted two walls. We are moving at earth-shattering speeds.

I was watching some of the guys painting on Wednesday night. We usually assume that it's old people who struggle most with changes. That's not what we learned in our scientific experiment. On Wednesday night, the kids were coming into the church as the walls were being painted. You would have thought we were sacrificing cats in the lobby. They were horrified. "What happened to our church??" They're piling together in prayer meetings. "What is taking place?"

It was CHANGE. And when change takes place, we get all riled up. Is this the beginning of more changes? Our perspective starts to be skewed. "I really don't like that color. I really don't like that wall. I really don't like that pastor." In other words, change can often bring out the real us, can't it? As small as some changes are, they can still get us fired up. I don't think it's true here, but sometimes change can cause us to fight against the plans and will of God. In some ways, that's how the early church responded.

But Peter helps us understand what Christianity really is. When he crossed the line and took the gospel to a group of Gentiles, he did not tell them that the men had to be circumcised, that they had to follow the dietary law of Judaism, or that they had to celebrate the Sabbath in a particular way. They were not told they had to become Christian Jews. Because of that, a group of people called Judaizers—who combined Jesus with Jewish traditions—came and told the people, "If you don't do all these things, plus Jesus, you can't be saved." So when Peter returned to the Christians in Jerusalem, he was criticized. "Not only did you hang out with uncircumcised Gentiles, you also ate with them and gave them the stamp of approval, affirming that they too are Christians."

Luke uses three opportunities to talk about this matter—twice in Acts 10 and once in Acts 11. What we read today is almost word for word what we read before in Acts 10. Why then does he bring it up again? As I've said before, we always need to watch for patterns in the Bible. Sometimes there are repeated words or sentences which should be seen as clues that what we're being told is important.

Luke is a meticulous historian and here he's sharing the same story three times. Why did he do this? Did the copy machine break? No. Does he have dementia? No. He's done it for a reason. He wants us to really think through this story.

By way of illustration, let me tell you what I most love about Thanksgiving dinners. Let me be honest. Thanksgiving dinner is all right the first time, but it's way better the second and third times. There's something about making that turkey sandwich or turkey soup from the leftovers. Luke wants us to glean all we can from this story, so by the time we're done all that's left is a carcass of bones, because we've grabbed everything we can off this situation.

You see, something huge took place in this story in Acts. Something huge has changed in the church. Peter didn't come home and say, "Hey, guys, we painted a couple walls in the lobby." What took place was that Peter had now welcomed Gentiles into the church—people who were never welcomed before. What a major change! What a major shift! So Peter has to help the others see what he himself has learned—and we need to see these things as well. Here are a couple things to recognize about what real Christianity is.

Christianity isn't about rituals and customs.

When the Great Commission was given, the disciples might have understood it to mean that they were to go on a search and rescue mission for all of the Jewish people who were far from God. They were in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. They would even find Jewish people in the uttermost parts of the world.

But what God had in mind—not just in the days of Jesus’ earthly ministry, but actually all the way back to His promise to Abraham—was that God was going to call all people back to Himself. His blessing would reach people from all tribes and nations, that those who would believe in and follow Him would outnumber the sands of the seashore.

So now the church had arrived at a seismic shift. They were being asked to let go of Judaism. They needed to let go of the way they used to do religion. No longer would customs or rituals get them closer to God. They didn’t need to clean up their lives before they could approach Jesus Christ. Peter realized the gospel could be communicated without these contingencies, without strings attached. There was no *quid pro quo*. Rather, the gospel message was to be received only by faith. If one believes, repents and confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, then that person is saved and becomes part of God’s family and the fellowship of believers.

Even today we put things in the way of people coming to know Jesus. We say, “Before you can come to Jesus, clean up your mouth. You swear too much. Before you can come to Jesus, you need to give to the church or serve the church or even just go to church.” We add all kinds of things that are good things—things mature believers in Christ need to have as part of their lives. But these are hurdles of sanctification, not of justification. They aren’t required for salvation. So we must be careful not to communicate to people that they have Jesus as long as they meet our expectations of what is necessary.

We have our own rituals and customs.

Christianity is all about receiving Christ.

In Acts 11:1, Peter clearly tells the people that *“the Gentiles also had received the word of God.”* What does that mean? The idea of receiving Christ is much bigger than we might think. In our testimonies, we often speak of the moment of our conversion. “I made a commitment in this service, at this camp, at this concert, in this small group. That’s when I came to know Jesus.” But our salvation is more like an iceberg. The part we see above the surface is only a small fraction of the whole. We usually don’t realize all God has done in our lives.

How did Cornelius and the other Gentiles come to know Jesus? The Word was preached and they believed it. But the change actually began before this. Before Cornelius met Peter, God had already been positioning him by giving him the faith and the ability to understand the gospel when he finally heard it. In other words, salvation is something God Himself accomplishes. It wasn’t that Cornelius was doing things right, so God noticed and responded to that. Rather, God was proactively moving in his life before he ever heard about Jesus.

God was also working in an amazing way in the man who would bring the gospel to Cornelius. Peter was given a vision, during which an angel told him what would be happening. God was working in both the life of the seeker and in the life of the evangelist to accomplish His purposes. All of this however is “under the surface.” Maybe we should consider all God did in our lives to prepare us to believe in Christ. Whom did He bring into your life? What were the circumstances that worked to draw you to Him?

At the same time, it wasn’t only God Who needed to act; Peter had to be obedient to preach the gospel. The Gentiles had to receive his words as being true. They had to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, sent to save sinners. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, after which they showed evidence of His work in their lives. Then they took the step of baptism, both by the Spirit and in water.

We need to realize that a lot of people believe Jesus is the Son of God. But we sometimes wonder if so many people actually believe this, why does our world look the way it does? Why is our culture so off course? Why do our friends, neighbors and even family say they believe Jesus is Lord, but then they don’t live for Him? Christianity is defined not just by what we say, but rather by how we respond to what we say we believe.

What good is it to believe in something if it doesn’t impact who we are? What good is it to recite a creed if we aren’t speaking from our hearts, if it doesn’t impact our lives? The glorious part of our creeds is that they are recited by individuals who not only believe them, but who also allow those words to impact every day of their lives. Those Gentiles didn’t just speak words, they affirmed what they said through action.

Salvation is a work God has already done before we’re even aware of it, but He has also now given us a work to do. We’re not just told to affirm things, but we must live them out. This helps us to realize that Christianity is not something that’s just a new form of Judaism, but it’s a totally new ball game. It is centered and founded on the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Our text responds to wrong attitudes by demonstrating how to address criticism.

The second thing we need to see is that our wrong attitudes can appear when we're criticized. Peter helps us by demonstrating how we should respond to criticism. After all the events with Cornelius and his family have taken place, and they come to know Jesus, Peter goes back home to report these things to his friends—only to be received with criticism.

Let's first define what criticism is. It takes two forms: constructive and destructive. The Bible speaks of constructive criticism—hard words from a close friend. These words are spoken with a desire to help us grow, to build us up. Proverbs 27:6 says words from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.

I could be wrong, but I don't think what Peter is receiving in this moment is actually intended to be constructive criticism. Even if they have good intentions behind their words, it seems to me they have condemned Peter as guilty even before he arrives. I think there's been gossip that has reached them, so when he gets there, they have already made their judgment about him. It's a parent-teacher conference all over again. "How could you have done these things, Peter? You've wronged the church. You've wronged Jesus."

Some of us know what it feels like to be in Peter's shoes. Some random day during the work week your superior comes into your office, criticizing you for a job he doesn't think was done well—no matter how hard you've worked at it. Or maybe you've heard it from a teacher or a coach—or even from your spouse. You've tried to do your best, only to be told that good isn't good enough.

The question is, how do we respond when criticism comes? Here are some things we need to remember, because it's easy for us, even as Christians, to become distraught when we're criticized.

Peter comes back to Jerusalem, excited to tell the others the good news of what has happened. But when he gets into the room, they call him on the carpet instead. They speak in derogatory terms of "uncircumcised men." They express scorn and even anger at what Peter has done.

When criticized, remember it can come from friends or foes.

The church has always been criticized. The church has always been mocked and persecuted by its enemies. But these aren't the enemies of the church. The criticism this time is not coming from the outside but from within. Sometimes those are the hardest critiques to work through. Peter is close to these people who are critiquing him for what he has done.

Peter has obeyed God and seen the Spirit move, only to come back and hear those closest to him saying, "You've blown it." He isn't alone in this, because Jesus was given the same treatment when He was on earth. He was accused of being crazy by His own family. On a couple occasions we read that His biological family tried to grab Him because they thought He'd lost His mind. Even James, His brother, criticized Him before he realized Jesus was his Savior (see Mark 3: 31–35; Luke 8:19–21; John 7:1–24).

Some of us may also be experiencing criticism from people we know. We should not be surprised by this. This world is filled with critics. Some jobs bring on greater levels of criticism than others.

When criticized, don't become too easily frustrated.

After Peter was criticized, look at his response in Acts 11:4. One translation says, "And Peter went off on them." Another one says, "Peter rebuked them harshly." But what does our translation say? *"But Peter began and explained it to them in order."* He's not frustrated. He's not angry. He's not defensive. In order to silence his critics, he doesn't fly off the handle or pontificate about how much above criticism he is as a church leader.

Still, that's how we can react when someone criticizes us. I will admit that my first reaction to criticism is to deploy my defense mechanisms. Alarms go off, then the guard rails and walls go up. My natural response—and I think it may be natural in you as well—is not just defensiveness. I want to attack. Once my walls are up, I start pulling out the pins in my grenades and throwing them over that wall. "Well, if you're going to criticize me, I've got something to say about you. If you don't think I'm very good at this, well, let me tell you what I think of what you're doing. Who are you to tell me I'm not doing a good job?"

We get easily frustrated and instead of responding in love, we lash out at the attacker with whatever harsh accusation we can think of—usually involving their motives, competency or knowledge, hoping to put them on the defensive to distract them from their criticism of us. "If I can get you to think about your issues, you won't be able to think about mine."

This is how some of our marriages operate, or the way we parent our children. We use a defensive counterattack because someone has criticized us, then we leave for school or work in a war mindset. But the Bible tells us in Proverbs 15:1, *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

We have to corral our feelings. Do you think Peter was upset? He had an amazing experience. He had six witnesses who could confirm what he was reporting. But in the face of criticism he didn't get frustrated; he stayed true to what he knew. In order to avoid frustration, we need to do the same.

When criticized, state the facts.

In the passage we read today, Peter retells the story of his experience, but with one unique application this time around. The story is exactly the same—he doesn't exaggerate anything. Nor does he back down. He doesn't say, “Well, we talked about circumcision and they're really thinking about it. Let's just give them some time.” He doesn't coddle the Jewish people in Jerusalem by speculating on what it all means. Rather, he states the facts just as they happened.

When we are criticized, we need to state our case. That's our right, as long as we do this in a God-honoring way. We do this by being completely honest about what we're being accused of.

Peter realizes these people weren't there to see what he saw. He probably knows there have been reports coming back that were confusing. So he does his best to give them a clear picture of the whole story. It was possible, of course, that his hearers would not believe his story. That's okay.

Your criticizer may think you're lying through your teeth. I've had people respond this way when I've told them the facts about something. They've accused me of having wrong motives—even though as best I could know, I didn't. Sometimes even stating the facts won't convince someone. They might think it's all bunk. But we must be honest and speak with integrity about what we know to be true. This is what Peter does, step by step. “In order, here's what happened.” His story is consistent with what really took place.

When criticized, find the hidden value.

Once we've told the story, our listeners may not be won over. In Peter's case, he does win them over—but let's say he doesn't. What if they still think he's wrong and has really blown this whole situation?

What do we do when the critic doesn't stop criticizing? One thing we must do is find the hidden value. Remember, there are two kinds of criticism: accurate and inaccurate. Most of the time we should assume that the criticism is a mix of what is true and what isn't. When we critique someone, we probably are speaking a lot of truth—but rarely are we 100% right about what we see. There's always a mixture of truth and exaggeration or error.

But if there's even 1% that's true in what we hear spoken to us, we need to see that part as valuable and let it impact our lives. Even if the judgment is brutally delivered, it still might be of worth. Our impulse is to think, “They're the spawn of Satan; I'm not going to listen to a word they say.” Even if the spawn of Satan gives you a nugget of truth about yourself—and you know it to be true—it's an opportunity to grow and change. Not all criticism should be simply thrown out. It definitely must be filtered to determine what is true and what isn't. But if your enemy says something accurate about you, then you're foolish to miss the opportunity to receive that and to change.

It's also possible to receive inaccurate comments given in what appears to be a good spirit. This is what I think is happening in today's story. The people don't hate Peter or want to destroy him. I think they love him, but they haven't yet understood what is accurate about Christianity. So it's with good intentions that they challenge what Peter is saying.

What is the right response in this situation? When that happens, should we respond in anger? Should we pontificate about how important we are? No, this then is our opportunity to teach and that is what Peter does with his friends. He gives them the real story. “I know you've heard some other things but let me give you the truth.” Paul told Timothy, a young pastor, that this was going to be important. In 2 Timothy 2:24–25, Paul says, *“And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.”*

I dislike that word gentleness. “Does that mean, God, that I can't yell at my people? I can't put them in their place?” “No, Tim.” It doesn't help that this is written to a pastor named Tim. “You have to gently instruct.” Listen to what Paul says: *“God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.”* That isn't speaking of salvation; it's referring to them potentially understanding the real story so they can see the error of their ways.

My job as a pastor, and your job as a Christian, isn't to drive truth home with a hammer and spikes. It is to lovingly instruct the person, giving them the whole story. We're not to get defensive or angry at the gossip that might have been heard. After all, we too have sometimes gossiped and even slandered others. But Peter gently gives them the story "in order." He states the facts. If at the end, what we share still doesn't convince them, at least they know the full, true story.

But what happens if his critics actually hate him and want to hurt him? Maybe they want his place in the church. Maybe they're angry that he's given up something important to them. Maybe he's now their enemy.

What happens when your critic is angry, and through malicious slander, wants to destroy you? What is your response in this situation? It's not an opportunity to change. It's not an opportunity to teach. Instead, it's an opportunity to show grace. Even then, we need to be careful. We are to love those who persecute us. We are to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

My dad once told me, "Be careful when you get into a fight with a pig. Both of you will get dirty, and the pig will be the only one who enjoys it." Some of us are getting into fights with people who want to bring us down. They rile us up, hoping to make us look stupid. But when we look stupid for the cause of Christ, that's something else. I've seen Christians on Facebook jumping into conversations they never should have joined. We can look really dumb in those situations. The Bible says, "Warn a divisive person once, and then have nothing to do with them. Leave it alone" (Titus 3:10–11).

"But what about my reputation?" you ask. Well, if you have proven your reputation already to a good number of people, one person's words aren't going to destroy it. Hopefully you've built an above-reproach reputation so that when someone says something untrue about you, those who know you best will say, "I know that can't be true about him." Leave it to God. Let Him be responsible for any revenge. As Romans 12:19 tells us, let God be the One Who repays. Show grace. Show love. That doesn't mean we don't protect ourselves, but we don't need to go on the offensive to destroy the critic who is among us. This is where Peter shows us what it means to live in a world of criticism. He does it well.

Our text responds to wrong attitudes by declaring the course we must take.

We've looked at the spiritual dimension of this matter, we've moved to the practical approach and now we'll end with an all-inclusive response by looking at the course we must take. What are we to do? Like the good apostle he is, Peter charts a course for us. Not only does he do this, but the entire Jerusalem church serves as an example of how to handle these challenging situations. They weren't perfect. They had fights and quarrels.

A couple months ago my wife and I were having a "discussion" here at the church. One of our church members saw us having this "discussion." They went home and told their spouse, "It's really great to see Tim and Amanda fighting." I lost that fight. But my imperfections comforted them, because they weren't perfect either. I don't know what you've been watching, but Amanda and I aren't perfect. We'll have our "discussions," just like you have them.

In the same way, we can take solace in the reality that the early church also was not perfect. Still, what we love about them is they fixed their problems through God's grace and power. Look at how they handled the challenge in this situation with Peter.

God is always up to something good; therefore, don't get in His way.

We need to realize that God is always up to something good. Do you believe that? Do you know that even in the worst of times, God is up to something good? Even in the middle of persecution and struggles and temptations—even with the changes that are taking place, whether in our personal lives or in the life of the church or the workplace or our community—God is up to something good. Christians, we need to see the glass as being half full, not half empty. We need to believe God is doing a work beyond what we can ever imagine. In response, there are things we must do.

First, we must never get in God's way. The Jews wanted to stop what God was doing. Some of us as parents are getting in God's way with our children. Some of us are doing it with our spouses. There are some churches that are held captive by cantankerous people. I'm not talking about here, but there are some churches that are held hostage by cantankerous people who get in the way of what God wants to do. Don't get into God's way. Think about it.

The people in Jerusalem thought they were fighting the battle on God's side, when in fact they were fighting against Him. They were fighting on the devil's side. We must stay out of God's way. He's up to something good.

God is always up to something good; therefore, stop giving others grief and start showing grace.

Are we ourselves those cantankerous people? Are we the ones who are always critical? Are we the ones who always say a bad thing when a good thing could be said? Let me tell you, I do this as a leader and I fail at it. Godly men and women come and tell me, "You're too negative at times." I don't want to be negative. I want the gospel to move forward, but when I see that not being done well, I want to call it out. At the same time, I realize I need affirmation and love—and I should remember that other people need these as well. Some of us sit in the balcony of life and criticize everything other people are doing in their lives.

These people in Jerusalem weren't out doing what Peter was doing. But when he came back reporting a bunch of new converts, they responded to him critically. Archeologists have found a picture of this group and I want to show it to you.



Do you know what this picture is? If you do, that means you're old. This is from the Muppet Show. At the end of the Muppet Show, after they've done all their great performances, these two guys would come on the screen. Did they ever say anything nice about the show? No! They knocked and criticized the show. They shot the characters down and told the show to close up and go home. They made fun of it.

Some of us, if we're honest, are criticizing Christians—and God is not pleased. My dad is a godly man and as an older man who's been a grandfather for many years, he's beginning to do an inventory of his life. He came to me some months ago and shared a true reality he's learning—and it's something I need to remember as I go into my 40s. He

reminded me that it doesn't matter how you did at the beginning of the race; it's how you finish the race. My father is beginning the last leg of his race. Do you know what his greatest temptation is? It's not pride. It's not lust. It's not sins of slander or sins of the mouth. It's not all the different sins that many young people struggle with. Do you know what his concern is? He says, "I don't want to become too critical. I don't want to be critical of my wife, my children and my grandchildren. I don't want to be critical of the church."

But he also said, "As I've gotten older, man, things really tick me off." The problem is that the filter is gone. Some of you have filters that are going bad as well. My dad, bless his heart, has come to his two boys and asked us to call out the critical spirit when we see it in him. "When it shows up in my conversations with your mother or with you or your kids—let me know." I was glad to agree, especially when it involved me. "I can do that, Dad. No problem."

Some of us need to ask God, "Is there something offensive in me? Am I critical?" When you are in your home or workplace or the church, do you only see things that anger you? Or do you see God on the move doing something great? If it isn't the latter, then you need to change your heart. Or more to the point, you need to ask God to change your heart. Start showing grace to people. Love people. Enjoy the journey with them.

God is always up to something good; therefore, give God glory for all He is doing.

Our text ends in such a wonderful spot. We read in verse 18, "*When they heard these things, they fell silent.*" Then the next thing they did was glorify God. They stopped whining and started to worship. They affirmed what God had said by saying, "*Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.*" They got it right.

Some of us need to stop our whining and start worshiping God for all He has done. You and I are a byproduct of this moment in Acts 11. Because of them, you and I have been welcomed into the church as God has called us. Where do you struggle today? Do you need a better definition of what Christianity is? Do you need to learn how to deal with criticism? Do you need to know what to do when you're criticized? Whatever it is, ask God to give you His Spirit's power to be able to do what He calls you to do.