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**Is Unreservedly Non-Prejudicial By Virtue of Submission
to the Spirit And Words of Christ
Acts Chapter Eleven**

The Book of Acts. Where does the name come from? Acts. What is that about? Acts of the apostles. What does the word “acts” mean? It is a business. The business of, or the work of, so you could actually translate it that way. The work or the business of the apostles. And what is that? What is the foundation of the church? So that we are crystal clear on this, let’s read them out of the Bible. I want to encourage you to become Bereans. Right? Bereans search the Scriptures to know that what they believe is actually what God is saying. Do not take my word for it. Paul shares with the Corinthians in this one statement the foundation or the cornerstone of the church.

(I Corinthians 3:11) “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

If we are going to start building a church, guess what? It has to be based on Jesus. There is no doubt about that.

Then in Ephesians,

(Ephesians 2:20) “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,”

This verse not only reiterates that Christ must be the foundation, but His church is built upon the prophets and the apostles. It is actually from Scripture that we get our name, Family Bible Church. Where does the name Family Bible Church come from? Scripture says that we are of the household of God. Therefore, we are Family Bible Church, the family or household of God.

(Ephesians 2:19) “So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household,”

The Book of Acts is establishing what? It is establishing the church. The church is now beginning. The Acts of the apostles will therefore lay that foundation. What we have been doing is walking through these chapters up to Chapter Eleven. It is a good way to do this because a lot of Chapter Eleven is Peter reiterating what just happened in Chapter Ten. Last week, we discussed Chapter Ten; so we know what he is talking about. Right? I do not even have to say anything. You have it memorized. We will review the first ten chapters, then go into Chapter Eleven tonight with the emphasis on what the church is all about.

Chapter One makes it clear that the hope of the church is Jesus Christ. The hope of the church is not money. It is not the believers building the kingdom on the earth. I saw an article just the other day that complained about the way that some churches spend money and how they build elaborate buildings. Somebody else chimed in and said, “I think you should just leave the churches alone because we are building the kingdom here on the earth.” I

thought, “Well, not really.” But I did not write. I am staying out of it. However, what we know is that we are waiting for Christ to come back. The church is waiting. This is one of the reasons why it would be very unwise for the church to invest in this world because we know that this earth is going to be burned up. Peter is very clear about this. All these things are going to be destroyed with intense heat as we read in

(II Peter 3:11) “Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,”

Note that it does not say, “Should we not be building more stuff? Should we not be buying more property?” I would suggest, “Probably not. Buy what you need to in order to function.” It is not the church’s place to build elaborate structures. There are a couple of passages that reference this. One is

(I Corinthians 1:4) “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,”

(I Corinthians 1:5) “that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge,”

(I Corinthians 1:6) “even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you,”

(I Corinthians 1:7) “so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,”

Look at the passage. Awaiting what? What is the church doing? “Awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is what the church is doing. We are waiting eagerly for the return of Christ; our desire is to be faithful until He comes. If you look with me in

(I Thessalonians 1:9) “For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.”

(I Thessalonians 1:10) “And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”

I know that I am giving you a lot of verses, but they are good to know!

(Philippians 3:17) “Brethren, join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”

(Philippians 3:18) “For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,”

(Philippians 3:19) “whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.”

On what? Earthly things. You do not want to do that.

(Philippians 3:20) “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;”

In Acts Chapter One, the angel says to them,

(Acts 1:11) “They also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken

up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

You are to be His witnesses until that takes place. Clearly, Chapter One of Acts establishes the hope of the church; and the hope of the church is not in its prowess. It is not in its ability. It is not its power. Its strength comes from a higher power and has nothing to do with its ability. The hope of the church is Jesus Christ. I want to emphasize that. The churches that are doing many works, that are buying huge amounts of property, and building extravagant buildings actually believe that they are ushering in the kingdom of God through those things. You have the doctrine. It does not say that.

Chapter Two establishes the power of the church. Once again, the power of the church is not what many other people say it is. “Well, if you have people with clout in your church, then there is great power. If you have people of authority in your church, then it is great authority. If you have people with a lot of money in your church, then

you are going to get things done.” From what we understand according to Acts Chapter Two, the power and the life of the church is the Spirit of God. There is nothing more powerful than people who are filled with the Spirit of God. And the church begins to breathe. Until the Spirit of God breathes in you, there is no life. Once the Spirit of God fills you, you can call yourself a church. Until that happens, you are just a log on the ground. You are not a living organism. But when the Spirit of God breathes in you, you become a church. This is why Jesus says, “You need to wait until the Spirit comes upon you because until then, you are not functioning.” You are not. You see how important that is throughout the book. Once again, this is foundational. If a church is to function, it does not function because a bunch of people gather together. It does not function because people have a building in which they come together and have a cross. That does not make a church. What makes a church is the Spirit of God breathing into the lives of people. In Chapter Two, you see them waiting for Pentecost, which once again was a

Jewish feast. At that point in time, the first fruits were to be given; the evidence of the first fruits of the church is when it begins to live and breathe and have its existence. The church is not a social institution. We do not talk about a wide variety of subjects. We have one person we point to, and that is Jesus Christ. There is no other foundation. There is no other answer to our problems. Often, people get upset when you say that the answer to their problems is Jesus Christ. “There has to be something else.” “What else?” And I go, “There is nothing else.” “It cannot be that simple.” “What do you want me to say? The answer is Jesus Christ. I come to you in the name of Jesus Christ. And I believe that there is power in the name.” A while back, Franklin Graham published a book, The Name. It is that name that begins to stir up hostility. It is that name that stirs up a tremendous amount of power. The name of Jesus.

(Philippians 2:10) “so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow...”

(Philippians 2:11) “and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”

We serve in the name of God. We are not ashamed of this name. He makes all the difference. We are not ashamed. If you are not talking about the name, you are not the church. This is a key point.

Chapter Four reiterates that the church finds its confidence and authority in Christ Jesus, which means that we subject ourselves to Him. There will be a time when the government will actually tell us not to do certain things. We will have to say, “Look, whether it is right for us to obey God or man, you be the judge, but we cannot keep silent.” We take our cues from Christ. Christ tells us to respect and honor the authorities over us. He tells us to submit to authority unless that authority goes against the fundamentals of Christ. I believe that the day is coming when the government will go against the laws of God. Many innocent people will be murdered. We are not going to agree with that. He is our confidence. The

confidence of the disciples in Acts Chapter Four is amazing. Did you mark that in Chapter Four? It is a sign of the Holy Spirit within you. It says in Acts 4:8 that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. See that in Verse Eight? If you drop on down to Verse 13, what did they observe in Peter? Confidence. The confidence of Peter. If you look at the end, it is reiterated once again in the church itself when they gather together. They are all in one place, and they begin to pray. Verse 31 says that the place where they had gathered together was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to speak the word of God with boldness, with power, and with authority. You go back to

(Acts 4:19) “Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;”

We cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard. We have a higher authority to whom we are answerable. There are going to be times when you have a higher

authority to whom you are answering. And you will have confidence. How wonderful is that? If you have to throw me in prison, it is all right. They eventually threw Peter in prison and later on they threw Paul in prison. Paul started singing. They will have a prayer meeting there.

The emphasis in Chapter Five, I believe, is that the church is the guardian of the truth. This is not only in this chapter but can be found in the epistles. I guess if I could put it this way, you could proof text throughout the epistles. That is to say that you will see that the church has one main purpose which is to guard the truth of the Gospel, the integrity of Scripture. Go to 1 Timothy 3. You see what is perceived to be a pretty drastic stance. You begin to realize that God means business with this. We are all called to be the guardian of the truth.

(1 Timothy 3:14) “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long;”

(I Timothy 3:15) “but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

There is that word household again. The church is the guardian of the truth. You see the truth being guarded in Acts 5:5. The Holy Spirit is going to guard God’s truth as well. You see that throughout the chapter.

Then in Chapter Six, the management of the church is focused. This is the beginning of the church having to deal with a specific issue. The Hellenistic widows were Greeks who believed in God. They were being neglected, and somebody needed to take care of them. It was the church's responsibility because these women were now confessing Christ in Jerusalem. They had been ousted from the social security branch of the government in Jerusalem, which was the temple. Now who is going to take care of them? The church steps up. Who is going to oversee these things? You do not want people who are untrustworthy to divvy out the money to take care of their

needs. You need somebody who is reliable, but more specifically, men filled with the Spirit of God. Stephen becomes one of those on the list as well as Philip. These are men who are filled with the Spirit of God. I want to stress this. The church has no position that is substandard. The church does not have a position of “authority over property.” You have overseers and deacons, but some churches add the position of trustees. There is no such thing. You are not going to see it in Scripture. Churches often bring in people and say, “We have a position for you; this is what you can do.” And I say, “Well, I would not put them in charge of anything because the fact is that in order for them to be in charge, they have to meet the same criteria. Deacons have to have the same criteria as overseers, as do elders, as do pastors. That is listed in First Timothy Chapter One, First Timothy Chapter Three, and Titus Chapter One. It goes down the list of character requirements and the recognition by those in the church as well as outside the church that they have and are above reproach. If in fact, they do not pass a litmus test,

they should not be in a position of authority. You do not have any substandard positions. In Acts Chapter Six, you have the managing of caring for the widows. You would think, “Well, how difficult could that be?” Why would you have to be Spirit-filled? Because God is concerned for those women's souls just as much as He is concerned for their physical needs. The way that they are going to be ministering to those women is going to be just as necessary as the fact that they are ministering to their physical needs. The ones chosen need to be astute. They need to be very much focused on what the Spirit of God is telling them to do that would benefit those women the most and would demonstrate a kindness to them. I have seen people give; and sometimes it is not only showy, but it is downright embarrassing to the person who receives. A person who is thinking of the other person is thinking in terms of “How can I do this in a way that lifts them up, that builds them up?” It truly is a privilege to give to people. We are going to see how God, in many cases, causes a need for the purpose of bringing two people

together. In Chapter Six, the church is managed by Spirit-filled followers. Now, I want to stop here and interject this. If you only had the Book of Acts and you were on a desert island with five hundred people, and you were convinced that God had called you to plant a church there, what would it look like? This is the way I want you to think. When you and I start thinking in terms of what is, we immediately crowd out what should be. Scripture is very clear about what the church is. It is very uncomplicated. It is very clear what is important and what is not. What permeates the Book of Acts is that this church or any church has to be built on Christ. The Spirit of Christ needs to be a part of the fellowship and should be leading and directing the church. The decisions, for instance, are not based on logistics; decisions are not based on pragmatism. I am going to throw myself under the bus- Decisions should not even be based on budget. Decisions should be based on the Spirit of God's leading and directing and saying you need to do this. Then there are times when the Spirit of God has hit me so hard that I

said, “We have to do this. We have no choice.” When you sense that the Spirit of God tells you to do something, you have to do it. Unfortunately, in many respects the church seems like its hands are tied. The people are hampered. They cannot think in terms of how the Spirit of God is leading in this particular situation. Here again, you will see it all the way through.

In Chapter Seven, Stephen takes center stage. You remember going through this. He stands before the Sanhedrin. He was declared to be a deacon in the church. I want to go back to Chapter Six just a second. When Stephen was brought in as deacon, was it by two-thirds majority? I am not clear about that. Maybe you could help me out. Right, he was appointed. It is the same thing that is done when Paul writes to Titus. They are to appoint men in Crete who will oversee the work. Then the church comes together and says, “Yes, we affirm this in the sense of not voting.” The church says, “We see no problem in this man. One of the things that we do when considering

a deacon or elder in the churches is to pass out the sheets of Titus One and First Timothy Three as these give the requirements. We say, “Now if you know of anything we do not know about this individual that would not allow him to be in this position, you let us know. We are not going to vote on his personality. We are not going to vote on his ability to play the piano or sing. We are not going to vote at all. Chapter Seven then shows us why Stephen was one of those who was chosen. Every church should be led by courageous men who speak for the Gospel. In other words, they should not be ashamed of the Gospel. They should be very forthright about it. They should be unapologetic about it. They cannot be bought. I often hear it as a quote: “good men in bad churches.” Ever heard that phrase? He is a good pastor, but the church is bad. I go, “The guy sold out.” There is no reason why he should be there. If he knows there is something nefarious, that something wrong is going on, he either needs to correct it to such an extent that they kick him out, or he needs to get out of there. But he should not have any

association with what is going wrong, and he should be bold enough to be willing to pay the price of dealing with it. These positions are not careers. You will see no criteria for careers for pastors, overseers, or deacons. You will not see any of that. I do not even see where Steven gave a resume. Do you? Unfortunately, much of what we do today is based on tradition. Are we any different from the Pharisees? The church is the one that brings people into the positions they need to be in by the presbytery coming together. Another word for presbytery is elders. They come together and lay their hands on them. They recognize the Spiritual gifts in those people. The Spiritual gifts are not academic. If that were true, why would Jesus go to fishermen? That is ridiculous. They see that they are unlearned men. “We are not going to hire those guys.” Right? Go back to First Timothy once again. I want to remind you that I am not spouting my ideas. Sometimes you just feel like you are going against the current on these things. Paul writes this to Timothy when he is pastoring a church at Ephesus:

(I Timothy 4:11) “Prescribe and teach these things.”

(I Timothy 4:12) “Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, show yourself an example to those who believe.”

(I Timothy 4:13) “Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.”

Paul has given the job description of a pastor. Exhortation would be application within the text and encouragement in that.

(I Timothy 4:14) “Do not neglect the Spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.”

There you go. There you have it. Presbytery is another name for elders. He continues,

(I Timothy 4:15) “Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them so that your progress will be evident to all.”

What things? Obviously, the word of God.

(I Timothy 4:16) “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.”

The most important thing that a pastor can do is keep you on target with the Scripture. That is the most important thing. That is his main responsibility. Chapter Seven is led by courageous proclaimers of Christ.

In Chapter Eight, the church is moved and directed by the Spirit of God to share the Gospel of Christ. This is a key point. When the Spirit of God moves and directs in a church, it is for one reason. You cannot say the Spirit of God moved me onto a jury to vote for something. The reason the Spirit of God moves you is for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel. It is the reason for the Spirit's existence in you. Let me give you two passages of Scripture that reiterate this.

(John 14:25) “These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you.”

(John 14:26) “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

The Helper or the advocate in the Greek is the “*parakletos*”, the Holy Spirit. He will help you remember not just a bunch of words, but all that Jesus said to them. If in fact the Holy Spirit is telling you to do something, I want to know what chapter and what verse it is. That is to say that the Holy Spirit is going to be guiding and directing you according to the way of Jesus Christ. If it is elevating or lifting up anyone or anything else, it is not the Holy Spirit doing that. It is you.

(John 15:26) “When the helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me.”

What will the Spirit of God do for you? He will bear witness of Jesus. The Spirit of God's Son will always bear

witness to God's Son. The church is moved and directed by the Spirit of God to proclaim Christ. That is why we are moved. We are energized for that particular purpose. There are a lot of organizations that are moved and energized to do other things. The church is moved by the Spirit of God. And our question is always first and foremost, how is Christ being proclaimed in this effort? Whether or not we have a social time, or whether or not we do work that helps people on the streets, the initial question is not how can we hand out the blankets, the initial question is how will handing out the blankets point to Jesus Christ? If that is not going to happen, I will not be involved in it. The Spirit of God is not moving me to be involved in benevolent works that make me feel good. The Spirit of God is moving for one purpose, and that is to proclaim Jesus Christ. Unless we proclaim Jesus Christ, we are only putting a band aid on whatever the problem is. In many cases, we are getting in the way of God's working in that person's life because what that person really needs to do is to get on his knees and cry out, "Christ, I need You."

Say that we come up to him and say, “Well, let me feed you and clothe you.” He says, “I do not need God. Thank God for you. You have become my Savior.” Why would the person turn to Jesus? They do not need to turn to Jesus. The only problem with their turning to you is that they are left with no eternal hope at all. It begins to harden their heart even more. I am not saying to not help people. You see someone lying on the street. The Scripture is very clear about that. You do not sit and ask him about his doctrine when he is lying there. Often, we do things out of the auspices of altruism and benevolence. The fact of the matter is that we are not really helping those people. We are making ourselves feel good. The Spirit of God is moving the church to share the Gospel. That is in Chapter Eight.

In Chapter Nine, we see that the church is the agent of affirmation and advocacy for all who will believe in Christ. Another way of putting it is that we are here to encourage those who proclaim Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

We are here to affirm what God is doing in their lives. This is very important because you are going to have people from every walk of life try to take certain positions. An example would be Simon the magician in the text who said, “I would like to buy that Holy Spirit thing.” There will be people who say, “Well, I am going to start a Bible study.” Where is the affirmation of the church? What is the person’s life like? How has the nature and the character of this person been displayed? Has it been displayed in front of the church? Are there people who will attest to this person’s character? Or is this person seeking a venue to put some cash in his pocket and to possibly be known by other people for the things that he is doing? What is his motivation? The motivation is always affirmed by the church. It is the church that establishes authority. Paul on the road to Damascus talked with Jesus Christ. Think about that. Paul personally talked with Jesus; and yet, he will not go out on his own without the church ordaining him to go, even though it was ten years later. That is an amazing point. Nor do I think there are many

people more equipped than Paul was. But this was God establishing the church as the venue by which he will work. The church is the agent of affirmation and advocacy. We come alongside and encourage all who believe. David puts it this way,

(Psalm 119:63) “I am a companion of all those who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts.”

I do not even try to figure out if my personality is going to mesh with this person’s? I do not try to figure it out. You might say, “I do not think I really like that guy. There is just something I do not like about him.” We do not have that option. Scripture says,

(John 8:15) “You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone.”

So how do I judge? How do you judge? We are to judge. We are to discern. How do we judge and discern whether or not we embrace this particular person if they love Jesus? Very simple.

(Psalm 119:63) “I am a companion of all those who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts.”

Let me just say this. If you are not choosing your friends that way, you are not choosing your friends rightly. In Chapter Ten, the church is the venue by which the disciples of Christ are guided and united. I was talking to somebody right before the service who asked, “How do I get started in ministry?” I said, “Well, it begins here. As you begin to minister to someone within the body, God will begin to open doors.” You see that with Peter in the Book of Acts. As he begins to go to certain groups of believers, God opens up another venue, another opportunity. You will be surprised as it happens. You will have more work than you know what to do with if you are obedient where God has placed you. It is a fundamental principle, as He tells the disciples, “Go into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and uttermost parts of the earth.” What is the fundamental principle? It is faith for where you are, right? To quote an old adage, charity begins at home. So

how are you ministering at home? This brings us to Chapter Eleven.

Chapter Eleven is an interesting chapter because of the fact that Peter begins to parrot back or verbalize the things that had taken place as the Lord was leading and directing him and ultimately brought him to Cornelius' house. Cornelius was a Roman soldier, a centurion. In that position, he probably commanded at least one hundred men. Cornelius was a man who was searching for truth. God had Peter go to him because, once again, as John Chapter 3 says, "If you are searching for truth, if you are a true seeker, God will find you." Certainly he brings Peter into Cornelius' path. As we begin Chapter Eleven, Peter has to explain to the church in Jerusalem that Gentiles are welcome in the kingdom. The church in Jerusalem up to this point is still comprised of only Jews. Peter explains that, when he went to the home of the Roman soldier, many Romans came to know the Lord. The church in Jerusalem goes, "I do not think that is kosher. You are not

supposed to do that.” I can just hear Peter say, “That is what I thought. But then God told me something different.” The passage reads something like this:

(Acts 11:1) “Now the apostles and the brethren, who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.”

(Acts 11:2) “And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him,”

Acts 11:3) “saying, ‘You went with uncircumcised men and ate with them.’”

(Acts 11:4) “But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying,”

“When I was in Joppa, I was on the roof of Simon’s house; and I was really hungry.

(Acts 11:5) “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me,”

“While I am up on the roof and thinking about food, I see all this food coming down in this blanket-like thing.” Think about it. If someone came up to you and said, “How did you know about this?” “Well, I had this vision. I was up on this roof and a blanket came down. All these unclean animals were in this blanket.”

(Acts 11:7) “I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’”

Jews did not eat anything unclean.

(Acts 11:8) “But I said, ‘By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’”

Peter explains that it happened three times. Why three times, by the way? Fullness of testimony. Fullness of testimony.

(Acts 11:10) “This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky.”

Finally, I got the message. In addition,

(Acts 11:12) “The Spirit of God told me to go with them without misgivings...”

“The Spirit told me to welcome these Roman men. It was a sign to welcome Gentiles.” God gave him this interesting sign. What I think is even more powerful is their response. After he tells them about this vision, they all go, “Oh, come on. I would like to see a picture of it on your phone. Something that would give me proof that this was not potato chips and ice cream or something.” No! That is not what they said.

(Acts 11: 18) “When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying ‘Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.’”

It is an unexpected and amazing response which tells me that the Spirit of God is working in the church as well as He was working in Peter's life.

(Acts 11:12) “The Spirit told me to go with them without any misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's house.”

(Acts 11:15) “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning.”

(Acts 11:16) “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”

(Acts 11:17) “Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”

(Acts 11: 18) “When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying ‘Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.’”

It is done. The church is being established not on the tradition of men, but unreservedly, non-prejudicially by virtue of submission to the Spirit according to the words of Christ. Paul will say to the believers in Galatia,

(Galatians 3:28) “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

They are all one in Christ. You begin to submit to all the prejudices that you may have. You lay them all aside. There remains only one question. Have they received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? If they have, guess what? I do not care what color their skin is. I do not care what national they are from either. They are my brothers in Christ. How wonderful is that? Immediately the barriers are broken down. The church is a place where there should be no prejudicial barriers at all. Once again, we recognize no man according to the flesh anymore, but only in the Spirit. We see that happening. You can hear the Holy Spirit saying, “This is the day when we welcome in the Gentiles.”

(Acts 11:19) “So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews alone.”

(Acts 11:20) “But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.”

This is the first time that the Greeks are being preached to. We have the Romans in Caesarea, which is a place of barracks for the soldiers and ships for the Roman government. Then we jump to the region of Greece and hear that they are receiving the Lord as well.

(Acts 11:21) “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.”

(Acts 11:22) “The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch.”

Do you think it was a mistake that the Spirit of God had Peter first go on his journey? Peter as an apostle paves the way. As an apostle, he establishes no prejudice. Then God opens up the door for the Greeks to come. They are going to be more receptive because they have already had it explained to them. Prejudice was gone.

(Acts 11:23) “Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord;”

Barnabas means, by the way, son of encouragement. He is not going to tear them down. He is going to encourage them and find out if this is true. He was a good man full of the Spirit. How do we know he was full of the Spirit? Because he was doing exactly what the Spirit of God has been pointing him to do just after Peter's experience. What is that? Open your arms to anyone who will proclaim the name of Christ. Does not matter your ethnic background. That is what the church does. Unreservedly. No doubt.

(Acts 11:24) “for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.”

(Acts 11:25) “And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul;”

This is not a mistake either. Why would he leave to look for Saul? Remember, Saul was shunned by the church

because they were afraid of him; he had been the one persecuting the church. “Think through this, Peter. I understand that those Romans were part of the crucifixion of Jesus, yet they are accepted. The Greeks are accepted. Why are we punishing Saul?” I can just see Barnabas saying, “Somebody needs to go and tell Saul that he is accepted. If Paul has received the same Spirit, then nobody should be ousted. It does not matter what the person has done in the past. Everybody should be accepted.” So he leaves to encourage Saul.

(Acts 11:26) “And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers, and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

I can imagine the fellowship at Antioch in this Greek church. By the way, to this day there is still a Greek church in Antioch. I rejoice to tell you that it is very evangelistic. I met some of their priests. What the passage is demonstrating to us is that in that church, there was a tremendous camaraderie because here you have these

people who had felt that they were outsiders but who now are seeing themselves as being included in the fellowship of God. Just imagine that you are allowed to witness the birth of Gentiles, the doors opening up for all the Gentile nations to enter. How wonderful would that be? Can you imagine the fellowship that was going on in the Antioch church? Barnabas thinks, “Okay. Where would be a good place for Paul to be accepted? The Jews are scared to death of him. Let's take him into the Greek church. They will embrace him.” Barnabas left for Tarsus to look for Saul and brings him to Antioch. Notice that the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. First time ever that they were called Christians. Up to this point, the disciples of Christ were called followers of Christ or followers of the Way. “Christian” is a Latin term. This is not a Greek term, not a Jewish term, not Hebrew, but Latin. They were first called Christians at Antioch. When Scripture says, “now at this time,” do you think it is a mistake?

(Acts 11: 27) “Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.”

(Acts 11:28) “One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine over all the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.”

More specifically, the text probably read “over all the world of the Jews.” It is probably this way because of what it says next:

(Acts 11:29) “And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea.”

We know where the problem is--in Judea.

(Acts 11:30) “And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.”

Now, why do you think this is happening? I am going to tell you why. Because the Jerusalem church is now in the midst of going through a change in their way of thinking.

“It is not just about us. God had called us Jews, and we know go all the way back to Abraham.” The reason God called the Jews was to be a blessing to the earth. They had not been. But their perception was basically “us and no more.” However, God is changing that perception. “We really are here that all the world should be saved.” The church in Jerusalem is now beginning to rethink. What would cause the Gentile churches and the church at Jerusalem to bind together? I will tell you what: have a famine in Jerusalem. They then need the churches in the other parts. Then God has those churches give to support the church in Jerusalem. That is exactly what happened. You are going to see this mentioned not only in Acts Chapter 18 but also in Corinthians where Paul will mention this a number of times. Second Corinthians Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 are all about Paul asking the church of Corinth to give to the needs of the saints of the church in Jerusalem. He is taking up this offering, and Barnabas and Paul are going to oversee it. What God is doing is uniting these two groups together. Would there

just happen to be a famine on this particular day of this particular year? No. It is God uniting the body of Christ, telling them that they are one. It goes back to

(Galatians 3:28) “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

“You are one in Christ.” “You used to be alienated Gentiles, but no longer. You are part of the family. There is no mistake.” Let’s return to

(Acts 11:28) “One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine over all the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.”

This took place when? During the reign of Claudius. Do you want to know why that is important? It is because Claudius does not like Jews. If there was a famine in Judea where the Jews are located, do you think Claudius cares? The worst time to have a famine in Judea would be when Claudius, who is a Caesar in Rome, could care less. No.

This is the best time because this is when the church will have to step up. Look with me in Acts Chapter Eighteen, (Acts 18:1) “After these things, he left Athens and went to Corinth.”

This is Paul.

(Acts 18:2) “And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them,”

That is where the Caesars live. Why did they leave? Claudius. What did he do? You know why Scripture is saying these things happen. The church is going to have to step up, and the church wants to step up. In fact, Paul will write about the church at Philippi. See Second Corinthians 8:1-6. It is a small church, but they were begging with much entreaty. Paul says they gave out of their poverty. When Paul finally arrives with this gift for the church in Jerusalem, he sits down with those people. He says, “Man, you should have seen the faces of the people in

Greece and how they longed to give to you. They were begging me, asking if they could give you more? Don't you think that began to unite the heart of the church at Jerusalem to the church that was in Philippi, in Macedonia's different regions, and in Antioch? It absolutely did. You see the hand of God that is unreservedly without prejudice uniting the church by virtue of their submitting to the Spirit of God and to His words, taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. It is like when Peter says, "God told me I have to take them in without any misgivings." There is an interesting proverb in the Old Testament that I often think about.

(Proverbs 16:33) "The lot is cast into the lap. But its every decision is from the Lord."

It talks about the fact that every decision of these dice is from the Lord. But one of the statements made is that, when there is a disagreement among men, they would often cast lots.

(Proverbs 18:18) “The cast lot puts an end to strife and decides between the mighty ones.”

The end of the casting of lots would be the decision. The end of every argument is the casting of lots. In other words, people stop arguing once the lots are cast. “Well, that is the way it fell. I guess we have to agree with that.” The reason that is such a significant passage to me is because Scripture is telling us that we can decide to let it go. You can decide to submit. People say, “I cannot submit to what Christ is saying. You cannot expect me to simply submit.” You would submit, however, if we cast the dice. You would let somebody roll the dice and accept the results. I have seen people fight over what side they are going to be on and finally agree to flip a coin. Whatever it says is all right. They cannot argue with a coin, but they argue with God. And when Scripture says, “If anyone is proclaiming my name, you cannot reject him. You must embrace him.” Guess what? You can decide to embrace him. That should be the decision you are making. That is

why Paul says we take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. We are going to do what God tells us to do. We are going to submit to His word; we will submit to His Spirit. And that is what the church does. Chapter Eleven is a great chapter. It is encouraging to me just to see, especially at the end of the chapter, how things begin to fall into place.

Prayer

Father, we give You thanks for the church. We just ask that You would clarify for us what we are supposed to do and what we are supposed to look like. But more than that, clarify the heart that we are supposed to have. Lord, forgive us. Forgive me for the many times that I have misrepresented You, for the many times that I have failed You and not pointed to You. The times that I have either pointed to myself or pointed to an organization or pointed to my abilities instead of giving You the glory. God, I just ask Your forgiveness that we would always just look to

You, the author and perfecter of our faith. May this church
elevate Jesus Christ. We pray this in Your name. Amen.