

God-Honouring Evangelism

Acts 11:1-18

Halifax: 27 May 2012

Introduction

For the past couple of weeks, we have been looking at the conversion of Cornelius and his household to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Luke draws a lot of attention to this event because it was one of the most significant events in redemptive history!
 - It was significant because Cornelius was the first Gentile to enter into the kingdom of God without first being circumcised.
 - There were certainly many Gentiles that had entered into the kingdom by submitting to circumcision and embracing the law of Moses,
 - but these ceremonies contained in ordinances were a barrier that kept the nations separated from Jews until God's appointed time—at the coming of Christ.
 - God had appointed the barrier with its food laws and ritual purification with the deliberate intent of separating His people until Christ came and completed the work of redemption for the remission of sins.
- By making it clear that Cornelius was to be received into the church of Jesus Christ without circumcision,
 - the Lord made clear what, in a way, should have been understood—that Christ had indeed abolished the commandments of laws contained in ordinances by the cross.
 - Now that He had fulfilled what God required for the forgiveness of His people's sins and for their full acceptance,
 - there was no more need for the temple and the altar and all the ceremonies that were mere anticipatory signs and symbols of what Christ would do!
 - After He had done it, the ceremonies were done away and we come to Christ on the basis of the good news that He died for our sins and was raised for our justification.
 - Our approach to God is through faith in the work accomplished rather than in the work anticipated through a great mass of ceremonies.
 - Those ceremonies of the Old Covenant, including circumcision, were ceremonies that were pre-enactments of the work of Christ in the shedding of His blood for the remission of sins.
 - Circumcision, the Passover, and the rituals of the temple all had to do with the shedding of blood.
 - I have pointed out that the sacraments of the New Testament are different because they are not attempts to re-enact the work of Christ,

- they but rather show the effect of His finished work on those who have a true interest in it...the application of His redemptive grace to those who believe.
- Neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper involve the shedding of blood, but both are based upon the blood of Jesus that was already shed.
- So by God showing for sure that Cornelius was to be admitted as a Gentile without circumcision,
 - He made clear what should have already been understood... that Christ had abolished the law of commandments contained in ordinances.
- Along with this, it also showed that the time had come for God to begin the work of gathering the nations to Himself—a work that He had waited to begin until Christ had come!
 - This, of course, is a wonderful thing for those of us—most if not all of us—who are not of the physical seed of Abraham!
 - God sent the gospel to us or to our forefathers and now we are admitted into the full blessing of God's kingdom—to complete remission of sin, reconciliation with God, and to the blessed hope of glory.

This is such a significant event in redemptive history that the Holy Spirit (speaking through Luke) gives us this very full and repetitive account of it in chapter 10,

- and then, as if that is not enough, repeats the whole story again in chapter 11,
 - and then the matter is brought up again in chapter 15 at the Jerusalem council as proof that the Gentiles do not need to be circumcised!

Today, we are at chapter 11 where the story is retold through the eyes of Peter.

- He retells the story to explain why it was that he had eaten with Gentiles.
 - He had to justify his action because some of the saints at Jerusalem confronted him about it.
 - It is noteworthy that after Peter explains himself, they accept it and rejoice that the Gentiles have received the grace of God.
 - The problem, however, of including Gentiles without circumcising them and requiring them to keep the ordinances of Moses is going to appear again and again in Acts, and also in many of the epistles.
 - But here, in this account, there is a happy resolution and receptivity of Peter and what he has done under God's direction.
- There are some very good lessons for us in this passage about God-honouring evangelism—how we are to do evangelism in a way that honours Him.
 - And so, as we have already looked at the event itself which Peter reiterates here, I am not going to focus so much on what happened with Cornelius,
 - but rather on the principles of evangelism that present themselves to us here.

I. First of all, I want you to consider that it is right to be concerned about whether our evangelism honours God.

A. You can see here in the first three verses of Acts 11 that there was concern about what Peter had done among the believers at Jerusalem, who, of course, were all Jews...

1. The news that the Gentiles had received the Word had arrived in Jerusalem before Peter did.

- You will remember from chapter 10 that Cornelius had asked Peter to stay for a while.
- We assume that Peter stayed for a while, and during that time, word had gotten back to Jerusalem!
- It would have been quite the topic of conversation...
 - You mean he stayed with them?
 - When were they circumcised?
 - They weren't circumcised?
 - How could Peter have stayed with them?
 - How could they have received the Holy Spirit without circumcision?
- This was very significant news and so it quickly reached the apostles and the brethren.
 - In verse 1, it says:
 - **Acts 11:1: Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.**

2. No one would have had a problem with their receiving the Word.

a. Proselytising was common among the Jews.

- In Matthew 23:15, Jesus speaks of some of his most rigid legalistic opponents compassing land and sea in order to make one proselyte.
- He adds that because of their hypocrisy they make this proselyte twice as much a child of Hell...
- But the fact remains that even the most orthodox Pharisee was not at all adverse to proselytising Gentiles!
 - That is not what Peter is called to answer for...

b. The problem is that Peter went and **ate** with uncircumcised Gentiles!

- Look carefully at what is actually stated in verse 2 & 3:
 - **Acts 11:2-3: And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"**
 - It was not that they were converted but that Peter ate with them!
 - That was the problem!

c. The ones who raised the concern are called "the circumcision."

- This could be just a way of emphasising that the believers in Jerusalem were circumcised in contrast with the Gentiles that Peter had admitted to the church...
 - But more than likely, it refers to a party of believers in the church at Jerusalem that were concerned that some of their fellow believers in Jesus were being a bit loose with the law of commandments contained in ordinances.
 - There were believers like Stephen who were beginning to understand that the customs were passing away...
 - but these called the circumcision did not understand that.
 - They could not perceive the difference in the moral law and the ceremonial law.
 - In their mind, trusting in Jesus ought to make people more careful than ever about following God's ordinances...
 - Jesus had plainly said, "If you love me, keep my commandments."
 - These ones called "the circumcision" were zealous for maintaining Jewish distinctiveness.
3. And the concern of these brothers is perfectly understandable!
- a. These brothers were concerned that Peter was compromising in a misguided effort to make proselytes.
- 1) Remember that before Peter saw the vision, he would have been just as offended with any of them who had gone to eat with Gentiles...
 - Even if the Gentiles did not serve pork or lobster, God had clearly instructed under the Law of Moses that their very pots and pans were unclean if they had cooked foods that were unclean...
 - And not only that, but even if beef was cooked in a new pot, they did not drain the blood according to manner of Jews.
 - Eating with the Gentiles was just not something you could do under the law.
 - This is why Daniel and his companions only ate vegetables in the palace at Babylon.
 - 2) Until Peter explained what God had shown him, his accusers had good reason to contend with him about what he had done.
 - It was not mere tradition that had been violated, but God's own instruction to His covenant people.
 - If the Lord had not yet taken down the wall of commandments contained in ordinances,
 - what Peter had done *would* have been wrong.
 - If they had been very sharp—sharper than Peter was before he had the vision—

- they would have figured it out that the cross had abolished the requirements of the ceremonial law—but who could have expected this of them?
- b. Rather than being criticised of Jewish bigotry and superiority when there is no evidence of this in our text,
- These men ought to be commended for confronting the apostle who was one of the very pillars of the church.
 - They did not consider him to be above the law just because he had been close to Jesus.
 - He was not above the law, for in future years, Paul the fellow apostle of Peter confronts him to his face for his hypocrisy...
 - his hypocrisy about the very matter of eating with Gentiles, or in that case, of refusing to do so when God had clearly told him that he was not to call what God had cleansed unclean...
 - These brothers at Jerusalem were right to inquire about what appeared to them to be transgression of the ordinance of God.
 - They wrong about the fact—the ordinance no longer stood—but they were right to be concerned if God’s ordinance was being ignored.
- B. Now my brothers and sisters, I submit to you that could we use some of this godly concern for the evangelism is done in our day.
- We have erred in the direction of having no concern about how evangelism is done—whether it is done in a way that is pleasing to God.
 - It is sometimes said, “I like the way I do evangelism better than the way you don’t do it,” and if we are not doing it, then shame on us...
 - But why not do it—and do it in a way that pleases God?
1. God is not honoured by many of the things we do in the name of making proselytes.
- a. Everyone agrees that at least there are some things that are illegitimate to do to win converts.
- 1) You would be hard pressed to find anyone who would argue that in an effort to win members of the Ku Klux Klan,
 - we ought to join the Klan and burn crosses with them in the yards of African Americans...
 - because how else can we reach the people in the Klan?
 - And after all, we are not under the law but under grace, and there is nowhere in the Bible that it says it is wrong to burn a cross.
 - 2) It would also be difficult to find people who would say that you ought to join an organised crime ring to win gangsters to Jesus...
 - or a drug cartel to win them...

- or go hunting with cannibals and feast with them so as to win them.
 - No one believes in *anything goes* evangelism.
- b. But it is not so difficult to find people that will justify other, more popular and socially acceptable kinds of sin...
- 1) There are those who will admit couples who are living in fornication into the membership of the church...
 - Or those who will admit women into the ministry when God's word does not allow it—
 - 2) And how common it is to set aside God's appointed way of worship for the sake of evangelism...
 - We will change the music that is supposed to inspire awe and praise into light rock or sentimental rot or little peppy jingles...
 - We will set aside the psalms that God has given us to sing and write other songs that don't talk about God's wrath and judgement.
 - We will replace preaching and scripture reading with interviews, stand-up comedy, drama, musicals, dancing, puppet shows, you name it!
 - We will come up with some unauthorised method to get people to make a decision for Christ—such as the altar call.
 - 3) The church is abuzz with stories about how by making a few changes, the church multiplied its membership!
 - And then everyone else jumps on board to imitate them—without even stopping to consider if what they are doing is biblical.
- c. And there are even those who will alter the very gospel itself in the name of evangelism.
- 1) There are those who deny the doctrine of Hell for fear that it might turn people off...
 - 2) And those who will tell people that you can be saved without repenting of your sins.
 - 3) There are those who tell outsiders that they will be rich and prosperous in this world if they will come to Christ—and never be sick again!
- d. These things bring great dishonour to the Lord.
- He is a holy God and we are to approach Him with reverence and godly fear!
 - That is not just the way it was under the law!
 - That is what we are commanded to do in the New Testament...
 - Hebrews is all about worship under the New Covenant, and in chapter 12, it wraps up much of what has been said with these words:

- **(Heb 12:28-29)** ²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. ²⁹ For our God is a consuming fire.
- Worship like that may not be very seeker sensitive, but it is the will of God and it brings honour to God—the honour He wants.
- Too often, the goal is to make the unbeliever or the uninformed person feel comfortable so he will stay, but Paul says, when things are done God's way,
 - **(1Co 14:24-25)** an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. ²⁵ And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.
- That is what honours God—not that the unbeliever comes back because she likes the music or because he enjoyed the skit.

TRANS> When we change what God has appointed, we bring dishonour to Him!

2. I tell you, my brothers and sisters, these changes not only dishonour God, they also bring great harm to the church in the long run.
 - a. While some of these changes may seem to succeed for a generation or two in increasing the church,
 - they in fact only succeed in bringing in more and more unregenerate people and what is worse...
 - in so watering down the gospel that after a while it is washed away and can no longer be found in that branch of the church.
 - Is this not what has happened in the mainline churches?
 - In a quest to be more relevant, they became irrelevant because they have no message to challenge our society...
 - They themselves have become the society that needs to be evangelised.
 - b. Do not try to deny it—the history of the church has proven it again and again.
 - The Roman Catholic Church tried to pattern its government after the Roman Empire...
 - It was not long until there were popes who were more like emperors—living in luxury with prostitutes, drunkenness, and all kinds of corruption.
 - And they brought in prayers to Mary and the saints to help pagans give up their worship of false gods...
 - But the outcome was that their members started worshipping the saints as gods who could protect them or intercede for the pardon of their sins.

- The liberal protestant churches began to set aside the Word of God in many of the ways I have already spoken about—
 - instrumental music was brought in, then songs of human composition, then doctrine that denies the wrath of God and certain aspects of God’s law...
 - All this in the name of winning converts—
 - And now there is virtually no gospel in these churches to bring salvation to their own sons and daughters!
 - I grew up in a church like that...
 - The minister denied that Jesus rose from the dead.
 - And now there are all these so called evangelical churches that are going down the same path, with all the enthusiasm that they are doing a great work for God!
3. I tell you my brothers and sisters, it is our duty to call one another to account for the way we do evangelism when it is not biblical.
- a. Often the person who confronts about this sort of thing is looked upon as a troublemaker...
 - Sometimes they are troublemakers—
 - if they are holding on to the traditions of men or
 - if they are happy with the status quo and do not want to see their church invaded by “those” people...
 - The Pharisees and Sadducees were troublemakers and Jesus often put them in their place...
 - b. But there are many honest, faithful, noble, loving, and godly persons who stand up against error in the church when it compromises...
 - And they are seen as troublemakers!
 - The voice of the prophets echoes through the scripture...
 - Moses and Nehemiah had to challenge those who set aside the Sabbath in the name of liberty...
 - The man of God went to confront Jeroboam for imitating the worship of pagans in his worship of the Lord...as Moses also did when Israel made the golden calf.
 - Isaiah had to confront Ahab for relying on Assyria instead of on the Lord—Ahab thought he was saving the kingdom by his action.
 - And the New Testament epistles are full of warnings about those who try to market the gospel and who appeal to human wisdom or who turn grace in licentiousness...
 - There are many such examples in the Bible...
 - And there are many examples among the reformers in church history.
 - Calvin and Luther and Knox and Ridley and Wycliffe and Zwingli...

- as much as anything, they endeavoured to reform the church according to scripture as understood by the fathers.
- And so they confronted all those practices that were not authorised by the Lord.
 - That is what we are called to do.
 - We are not to be indifferent about what the Lord has appointed for His church.
 - We ignore this to our own destruction.

II. And now I want you to consider secondly that we must be able to demonstrate that our evangelism honours the Lord.

A. Like Peter, we ought to be willing to give a defense when legitimate questions are raised.

1. If you are honest about doing the will of God and if you believe that you are doing the will of God,

- you will count it as a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate that you are doing things God's way.
 - It is an opportunity to show those who ask what God's will is in the matter.
- You see in verse 4 how it says that Peter explained to them in order...
 - **(Act 11:4) But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying**
 - The language here suggests that he gave an orderly account in the sense of a defense that was set in order—logical and well thought out.
 - He was happy to show them what God had so clearly revealed to him.
 - Take the time to answer those who challenge you.
 - Peter longed for unity in the church—not any old unity, but unity in the truth...
 - So he happily answers those who have expressed concern.

2. Of course there are very often times when inquisitors who are not really honest about God's will confront you...

- a. They criticise you and then, as soon as you start to demonstrate what you are doing from scripture,
 - they tell you that they don't want to talk about it!
 - They are not like these men that confronted Peter and then listened carefully to Peter's defense and were convinced by it.
- b. Jesus had a lot of people who were feeling guilty in His presence...
 - They were not interested in God's will—they just wanted to find fault with Jesus.

- Their confrontations did not arise out of concern for the truth.
 - But even so, Jesus usually answered them and gave clear warrant for what He was doing.
- B. Peter gives four good pieces of evidence that it was God’s will for him to eat with the Gentiles.
1. First, he speaks of the vision that he had...
 - He was going about his own business—praying in fact—when this sheet with a mixture of clean and unclean animals came down from heaven (and so from God).
 - And then a voice came (also from heaven) and said, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat.”
 - But Peter refused, and said:
 - **(Act 11:8) Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.'**
 - Then the voice from heaven said, “What God has cleansed you must not call common...”
 - It happened three times!
 - The obvious implication is that God has cleansed what He had declared to be unclean under the Mosaic institutions.
 - He is showing Peter that the ceremonial law of commandments contained in ordinances has been abolished.
 - That is the first evidence that it was right for Peter to eat with Gentiles.
 - If God has cleansed foods, what could stop him from eating with Gentiles?
 2. Second, Peter shows that he was expressly commanded to go with the Gentiles...to this Gentile’s house who had sent for him..
 - Look at verse 11-12:
 - **Act 11:11-12: ¹¹ "At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.**
 - Right after seeing the vision instructing him not call common what God has cleansed, these three Gentiles come looking for him...
 - But the thing that clinches it is that the Holy Spirit directly instructs Peter to go with them without doubting (or making distinctions).
 - Peter did not initiate this—nor did the men at the door...
 - He did not even ask if he could go with them or should go with them...
 - He was simply told by the Holy Spirit—all at the Spirit’s initiative—to go with them.
 - That is the second reason Peter gives in support of his going to a Gentile’s house.

- He gives these proofs as they were presented to him... not in the order in which they happened...so...
- 3. Third, he gives the proof that Cornelius had seen an angel who gave divine instruction to him to send for Peter...
 - Look at verses 13-14:
 - **(Act 11:13-14) ¹³ "And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, ¹⁴ who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.'**
 - The proof that Peter was supposed to go to this man's house is really adding up!
 - A vision declaring that foods are not to be considered unclean...
 - A command from the Holy Spirit to Peter to go with Gentiles who showed up at his door...
 - A command from an angel to the Gentile telling him to send for Peter—
 - Peter was meant to go!
 - Instruction had come from heaven!

TRANS> But now comes the final and most conclusive proof of all...

- 4. Peter describes how the Spirit came upon these Gentiles even as he was preaching to them...
 - **Act 11:15: ¹⁵ "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.**
 - He notes that the Spirit came on these Gentiles in the same way that He had come on Peter and the other disciples at Pentecost...
 - There was no laying on of hands—the Spirit simply fell on them.
 - It is a free and unsolicited act of God, just as it was at Pentecost...
 - It was, in fact, a Gentile Pentecost.
 - And now Peter gives us some new information—he tells us what came into his mind when the Spirit fell on these Gentiles...
 - He remembered the promise of the New Covenant that Jesus had announced:
 - **Act 11:16: Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'**
 - Baptism is the symbol of cleansing, and Jesus had promised a cleansing of Peter and the 120 in the upper room by the baptism of the Holy Spirit...
 - And now Peter sees that this cleansing is given to Gentiles who previously were considered unclean!
 - The Lord was showing on no uncertain terms that He had cleansed them and that they could no longer be called unclean!

- Both Jew and Gentile were brought to God by a new and living way—through the blood of Jesus.
 - That means that Peter could eat with Gentiles!
5. And so, having presented these four proofs with the last one bringing them all to a climax, Peter brings a question to his inquisitors...
- **(Act 11:17) "If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"**
 - It was a question that no one could answer!

TRANS> So you see how fully and how courteously Peter answered those who contented with him.

- He did not get all upset and start fussing at them for questioning his authority or his integrity...
 - He would have had the same questions just a few weeks before.
- So there are two things to learn here...
 - First, that you ought to have good reasons for what you have done—reasons that can be supported from the Word of God...
 - If you cannot show good warrant for what you have done, then you need to admit it and desist from your unbiblical practice.
 - Second, that you ought to present those reasons to those who question you with gentleness and clarity.
- And now we are ready to look at the third principle of evangelism that presents itself to us in this passage...namely...

III. That we ought to always rejoice when God saves sinners!

- We ought to be eager to see the salvation of sinners!
 - We ought to do what we can to reach them and to encourage those who do the work of evangelism.
- A. These who contended with Peter really do seem to be honest, sincere believers because of the way they respond!
1. Peter has shown them with very persuasive arguments that it was clearly God's will for him to go to the Gentiles...
 - And instead of holding on to their original position and refusing to let it go, these men become silent.
 - They have no answer for Peter and they know it.
 - Of course being put to silence does not necessarily mean that they have accepted what Peter has told them.
 - Jesus often brought those who tried to contend with Him to silence because of the wisdom by which He spoke...

- What He said was so clear that they simply had nothing to say!
 - It was silence of bitter defeat rather than a silence of one who has been convinced.
 - Beware of an evil spirit of pride and malice that keeps you from the truth—
 - When you are wrong, you must be willing to admit it...
 - Just let go of it—humble yourself—and receive with gladness the sweet truth of God.
2. These men show that a very good spirit is in them because they go from accusing Peter to rejoicing in the conversion of the Gentiles...
- Look at verse 18:
 - **(Act 11:18) When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."**
 - Do you see?
 - They did not merely accept the truth that God had shown mercy to the Gentiles—perhaps with reluctance...
 - but they rejoiced in in what God had done!
 - They rejoiced in it!
 - This rejoicing shows that they themselves were recipients of God's mercy...
 - They loved God's mercy because they had received His mercy.
 - And for that reason they could not help but rejoice wherever they saw it!
 - Those who are strangers to mercy are offended when they see others receiving mercy...
 - "Who are those people?"
 - "They just don't want to take responsibility for their actions!"
 - But these men give glory to God...
 - They put aside their initial opinion and they glorify God for what He has done.
- B. We need to give glory to God wherever His mercy is seen!
1. Just think what a wonderful thing it is whenever people are saved!
 - They did not deserve it any more than we did...
 - But God has still saved them—just as He has saved us!
 2. He has granted them repentance as He has us...
 - Repentance is His gift...

- Without it, we would still be resisting Him—we would not know the Lord—we would be cold toward Him and far from His grace.
 - But with it—we come to love Him...
 - we come to see the lengths to which Christ has gone to save us...
 - Just think of it—He, the very Son of God—gave all—and how much He had to give!
 - He actually bore the eternal curse in our place.
 - Just think of it—we are spared from an eternity in Hell—
 - And not just spared from that,
 - but given an inheritance in the very house of God!
 - We will see His beauty and we will live in His presence!
 - He will make us beautiful as His image bearers—each one of us with our unique personality—
 - Yet as His perfect image.
3. As soon as you learn of someone’s salvation—this wonderful salvation...
- let it fill you with the thoughts of your merciful God!
 - Yes, think of this when you look around this room at the other believers—at your spouse, at your children, at your parents, at your siblings...
 - Say to yourself—there is another person upon whom God has shown mercy!
 - There is another object of His saving grace!
 - Blessed be the name of the Lord!
 - What a difference His grace has made!

Conclusion:

But now in conclusion, I want to point out a difficult thing...a difficult thing for us to do...

- It is something that we can only do by the grace of God...
 - It is that we should rejoice in evangelism and at the same time care about how evangelism is done!

Sometimes it seems that these two things are incompatible...

- that you either have people who refuse to compromise, but have little concern for reaching the lost...
 - or that you have people who are so concerned about reaching the lost that they don’t care how it is done—just as long as it is done.

But if God’s grace is truly at work in us, we don’t have to make a choice between a heart for mercy and a love for purity.

- With Jesus Christ, these two are brought together in perfect harmony.

- You cannot find such mercy as you find in Jesus...
- But neither can you find such purity as you find in Him.
 - All the fullness of the divine nature is in Him!
- Now think about this...
 - Those who seem to love mercy but have no regard for purity really don't love mercy because mercy does not involve the rejection of purity...
 - In fact, the very *foundation* of mercy is purity!
 - True mercy only operates where there is true purity...
 - Otherwise it is not mercy, but the laying aside of purity.
 - It is the Devil's lie that you have to give up one to have the other.
 - That is the amazing thing about God—He is totally holy and yet He accepts us and cleanses us who are unclean.
 - That is what is so marvellous about Him...
 - That is what is so splendid about the cross.
 - And it works the same way with those who seem to love purity but do not love mercy...
 - They really don't love purity, because if they did, they would have to love mercy.
 - If they suppose *themselves* to be pure, they have no idea what real purity is!
 - If you truly love purity, you know that you are nowhere near true purity—that only God is pure and holy...
 - And that your acceptance from one so holy can only be through mercy.
 - The problem with anyone who believes in works righteousness is that his view of righteousness is too low... way too low...
 - because he imagines that he can be righteous by his deeds!
 - What a pitiful, inadequate concept of purity that is!
 - So my brothers and sisters, do you not want to be a true lover of purity and mercy?
 - Do you not want to be like these saints at Jerusalem,
 - who wanted to see the gospel advanced without compromise (in purity),
 - but at the same recognised it and rejoiced in it when the mercy of God came—even to the once unclean Gentiles?
 - Of course you want this!
 - If you truly know God's mercy, of course you do!
 - You have no desire to tear down purity to have pretended mercy...
 - Nor do you desire to tear down mercy to have pretended purity...
 - You want them both together!
 - And by God's grace, you shall have them both!
 - That is the message of the cross!