

Acts Chapter 11

Vs. 1-18 Peter is called to explain

Though Peter is one of the Jerusalem Council – the 12 Apostles – even he cannot decide the future of the church alone.

He returns to Jerusalem and the Council wants to know what is going on. Why did you eat with unclean Gentiles? Are Gentiles are now part of the church?

Peter retells the story of his vision and Cornelius. Ending with a major question – if God gave the Holy Spirit to them, who was I to hinder God?

When the Council heard this they were silenced. In the face of the Spirit's work, they were called to adjust and accept that God's way may be different.

Vs. 19-30

The spread of the Gospel is rolling along like a wave. Gentiles as well as Jew are being converted but Jerusalem is still ultimately in charge. In acts 15 we will see that even Paul missionary strategies called for debate in Jerusalem. The concern is legitimate. We even see it today. As evangelists move farther away from the source of their teachings the more likely compromise or even corruption may arise. It may be difficult for us to envision but there were numerous preachers carrying the gospel news far and wide.

The Council hears such rumors about Antioch and sends Barnabas to examine the new practice of gentile conversion to make sure it conforms to the apostolic norm.

Barnabas happily reports that he saw the grace of God.

Barnabas searches out Paul and persuades him to come to Antioch to teach these converts. The men spent a year in teaching the church at Antioch and it is here that the disciples were first called Christians.

From the experience of Antioch, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the “church”

First the essential tenets must rest on the tradition of the Twelve.

Second new Christians must be nurtured. Creating faithful disciples is more than collecting a list of names.

In Acts, being a Christian is first a matter of having experienced the Holy Spirit but it is also a matter of understanding. This Christianity is a religion that is to be discussed, learned, debated and taught.

The church is about both conversion and nurture.