

The Book of Acts, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 17: The Gospel Defended; the Church at Antioch

Acts 11:1-30

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Acts 11 defends the inclusion of the Gentiles and introduces the vibrant church at Antioch. What is doctrinally at stake includes the confirmation that God has granted the Gentiles repentance unto life (the gospel for all nations), the way doctrinal questions are settled by submitting to God's revealed action rather than human prejudice, the call to remain faithful with steadfast purpose, the identity of Christ's followers as Christians, and the generous, unified life of the church across ethnic lines.

Continue handling the Cornelius events as the previous lesson did: the Spirit fell on the Gentiles as a confirmation that they were to be received, just as at the beginning, not as the normative way every believer receives the Spirit. The point that silenced every objection was that God granted the Gentiles repentance unto life; the gospel is for all nations. The heaviest doctrinal weight in this lesson falls on the name Christian and what it means to bear the name of Christ, together with the benevolent unity of the church.

Yet aim at the heart. This passage calls students to humble submission to God's will, to rejoice when He works unexpectedly, to remain faithful with steadfast purpose, to bear the name of Christ worthily, and to love and provide for the family of God. Help them become steadfast, openhearted, generous Christians.

Question 1

Student Question:

When Peter finished his account, the believers fell silent and glorified God, saying, then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life (v. 18). What does this conclusion affirm about the gospel and about repentance, and how was the matter of Gentile inclusion settled?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The conclusion the Jerusalem believers reach is a landmark affirmation: to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life. The gospel is unmistakably for all nations. What had been God's purpose from the beginning is now openly acknowledged by the church: Gentiles are received into life on the same terms as Jews.

Notice the phrase repentance that leads to life. Repentance is described as something God granted, given through the gospel as God in His kindness leads people to turn to Him (Romans

2:4; 2 Timothy 2:25). And it leads to life; genuine repentance is the turning that issues in salvation. This is the same response God calls for from all people everywhere (Acts 17:30).

Consider how the matter was settled. Peter did not win by argument or authority but by recounting what God had plainly done: the Spirit fell on the Gentiles just as on the Jews at the beginning, God's own confirmation that they were to be received. The church submitted to the evident action and will of God rather than clinging to prejudice or tradition.

Help students see both the truth and the method. The truth: God grants repentance unto life to people of every nation; the gospel is for all. The method: doctrinal questions are rightly settled by submitting to what God has revealed, not by defending our preferences. When God's will became clear, the faithful response was silence, worship, and glad acceptance.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel for all nations, Gentiles granted repentance unto life (v. 18)
- Repentance as God's gift, leading to life (Romans 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:25)
- The same call to repentance for all people (Acts 17:30)
- Doctrinal questions settled by submitting to God's revealed action
- Worship and glad acceptance as the response to God's clear will

Discussion Prompts

- What does this conclusion affirm about the reach of the gospel?
- What does it mean that God granted repentance that leads to life?
- How was the question of Gentile inclusion settled?

Question 2

Student Question:

Peter asked, who was I that I could stand in God's way? (v. 17), recognizing he must not resist what God was clearly doing. Are there ways you find yourself resisting or standing in the way of what God is doing, in your life, your church, or others? How can you cultivate a more yielded heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter's humble question is striking: who was I that I could stand in God's way? Faced with God's clear action, Peter recognized that to resist it would be to oppose God Himself. He yielded, even though it overturned a lifetime of assumptions.

We can find ourselves standing in God's way in various ways, resisting a change He is bringing, clinging to preferences He is challenging, opposing what He is doing in our church or in another believer's life, or simply digging in against a conviction He keeps pressing on us. Like the early objectors, we may resist out of prejudice or comfort.

Invite honest reflection. Where might I be standing in God's way? Is there something God is clearly doing that I am resisting because it is unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or not what I would have chosen? A yielded heart asks not how do I get my way but what is God doing, and how do I get in line with it.

Encourage cultivation of a yielded heart. This grows through humility, through holding our preferences loosely, through asking whether our objections are about God's will or our own comfort, and through a settled willingness to glorify God and accept His way, as the Jerusalem believers finally did. The yielded heart is the one God can lead.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of resisting what God is clearly doing
- Humility that yields to God over personal preference
- Distinguishing God's will from our comfort
- A yielded heart as one God can lead

Discussion Prompts

- Where might you be standing in God's way?
- Are your objections about God's will or your own comfort?
- How can you cultivate a more yielded heart?

Question 3

Student Question:

The dispute was settled not by argument or tradition, but by recognizing and submitting to what God had clearly done (vv. 4-18). What does this teach about how we should resolve disagreements over what is right, and about the authority of God's revealed will over human prejudice and custom?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The way this controversy was resolved is instructive. The objectors had tradition and long-standing custom on their side; Gentiles had always been kept at a distance. But Peter pointed to what God had plainly done and said, in effect, God has decided this, not us. And the church submitted to God's revealed will over their inherited assumptions.

This teaches us how to resolve questions of what is right. The final authority is not our traditions, preferences, feelings, or the way things have always been done, but the revealed will of God. When God has spoken or acted clearly, our part is to submit, even when it overturns cherished customs.

For us, God's revealed will is found in the completed Scriptures. We do not have new visions and outpourings as Peter did, but we have something more settled: the inspired, sufficient word of

God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Disagreements over what is right are rightly settled by asking what God has revealed in His word, not by appealing to human authority or tradition.

Help students embrace this principle. It guards against two dangers: elevating human tradition above Scripture, and following our own preferences while calling them God's will. The humble, faithful path is to ask honestly what God has revealed and to submit to it, laying down prejudice and custom when they conflict with His word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's revealed will as the final authority over tradition and prejudice
- Submitting to what God has clearly shown
- Scripture as God's settled, sufficient revelation today (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- Guarding against elevating tradition or preference above God's word

Discussion Prompts

- How should we resolve disagreements over what is right?
- Why must God's revealed will outweigh human tradition and custom?
- Where do you see tradition or preference being treated as if it were God's word?

Question 4

Student Question:

The believers had to let God overturn a deeply held assumption about who could belong to His people (vv. 1-3, 18). Are there cherished assumptions or traditions of your own that God may be calling you to examine in light of His word? How open are you to being corrected?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The objectors in this passage were sincere believers, yet they held an assumption that God had to correct. This is humbling: we too may hold assumptions, even ones we are sure of, that do not align with God's word and will.

Invite honest reflection. What assumptions or traditions do I hold so deeply that I have never examined them? They might concern who belongs, how things should be done, what is acceptable, or what I expect of God. Some of our firmest convictions may be inherited custom rather than the teaching of Scripture.

Being open to correction is a mark of a teachable, faithful heart. It does not mean abandoning truth or chasing novelty, but holding our assumptions up to the light of God's word and being willing to change where they do not match it. The same word that comforts us must also be allowed to correct us.

Encourage students to bring their assumptions to Scripture with humility. The goal is not to doubt everything but to be people who love truth more than tradition and who would rather be corrected than be wrong. As with the Jerusalem believers, the fruit of such openness is that we end up glorifying God for what He is doing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Examining cherished assumptions in light of God's word
- Distinguishing inherited custom from scriptural teaching
- Openness to correction as a teachable heart
- Loving truth more than tradition

Discussion Prompts

- What deeply held assumptions have you never really examined?
- How can you tell the difference between God's word and inherited custom?
- How open are you to being corrected by Scripture?

Question 5

Student Question:

At Antioch, believers preached the Lord Jesus to Greeks, and the hand of the Lord was with them, so that a great number believed and turned to the Lord (vv. 19-21). What does it mean that the hand of the Lord was with them, and what does this teach about God's part and ours in the spread of the gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Luke gives a striking explanation for the fruitfulness at Antioch: the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The growth was not merely the result of human effort; God Himself was at work, blessing and empowering the witness.

This phrase, the hand of the Lord, speaks of God's active power and favor. The believers preached, but God gave the increase. As Paul would later write, I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). True spiritual fruit is always God's work through willing people.

This teaches the partnership between God's part and ours in the spread of the gospel. Our part is faithful witness, telling people the good news about the Lord Jesus, as these believers did. God's part is to open hearts, grant repentance, and give the growth. We labor; He produces fruit.

Help students hold both truths. We must not be passive, assuming God will save people without our witness; the Antioch believers actively preached. But neither should we be self-reliant, as

though results depended on our skill; it was the hand of the Lord that brought the harvest. We work faithfully and depend on God for the fruit.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The hand of the Lord as God's active power in the gospel's spread (v. 21)
- God giving the growth through faithful witness (1 Corinthians 3:6-7)
- The partnership of God's part and ours in evangelism
- Faithful labor combined with dependence on God for fruit

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the hand of the Lord was with them?
- What is God's part and what is ours in the spread of the gospel?
- How do we avoid both passivity and self-reliance in witness?

Question 6

Student Question:

The church at Antioch was a new kind of congregation, Jews and Greeks together, united in Christ (vv. 19-21). How well do you embrace a church family that includes people very different from you? What is your part in helping your congregation welcome and include new and different people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Antioch represented something new: a congregation where Jewish and Gentile believers worshiped together as one. The old barriers were coming down, and a beautifully diverse church was being formed, united not by background but by Christ.

This is a picture of what the church is meant to be, a family drawn from every kind of people, made one in Christ. Yet we often prefer the comfort of sameness, gravitating toward those like us and keeping a quiet distance from those who are different in background, culture, age, or temperament.

Invite honest reflection. How well do I embrace a church family that includes people very different from me? Do I welcome newcomers and outsiders, or do I stay within my familiar circle? A congregation becomes like Antioch only when its members open their hearts beyond their comfort zones.

Encourage one concrete step toward welcome. Perhaps it is to seek out and befriend someone different, to make a newcomer feel at home, to bridge a gap of age or background, to widen our circle. Each of us has a part in helping our congregation reflect the diverse, united family God is gathering in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church as a diverse family united in Christ
- The temptation to prefer the comfort of sameness
- Welcoming the different as reflecting God's gathered family
- Every member's part in including newcomers and outsiders

Discussion Prompts

- How well do you embrace a church family that includes people different from you?
- Do you tend to stay within your familiar circle?
- What is your part in helping your congregation welcome new and different people?

Question 7

Student Question:

Barnabas, a good man full of the Holy Spirit and faith, saw the grace of God at Antioch and encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose (vv. 22-24). What does it mean to remain faithful with steadfast purpose, and why is this exhortation so important for new and growing believers?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When Barnabas arrived at Antioch and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and his counsel was simple and vital: remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose. The phrase pictures a settled, deliberate resolve to stay with the Lord, not a fleeting enthusiasm but a firm, ongoing commitment of heart.

This exhortation is essential because beginning the Christian life is not the same as continuing in it. Many start with joy but later drift, cool, or fall away. The New Testament constantly calls believers to continue, to hold fast, to endure to the end (Hebrews 3:14; 10:23; Colossians 1:23). Faithfulness is a marathon, not a sprint.

Notice the kind of man who gave this counsel. Barnabas was good, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and he had a gift for encouragement. He did not merely correct or instruct; he came alongside new believers and strengthened their resolve to keep walking with the Lord. The church needs such encouragers.

Help students grasp the importance of steadfast purpose. The Christian life requires not just a good beginning but a faithful continuance, a deliberate, persevering commitment to stay close to the Lord through all that comes. And it reminds us that we are called to encourage one another in this, helping new and growing believers hold fast.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Remaining faithful with steadfast, deliberate purpose (v. 23)
- The call to continue and endure to the end (Hebrews 3:14; Colossians 1:23)
- Faithfulness as continuance, not merely a good beginning
- Encouragement as a needed ministry (Barnabas)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to remain faithful with steadfast purpose?
- Why is this exhortation so important for new believers?
- Who has encouraged you to remain faithful, and whom could you encourage?

Question 8

Student Question:

Barnabas urged the believers to stay faithful with steadfast purpose over the long haul (v. 23). What threatens your steadfastness right now, drift, discouragement, busyness, or trial? What practices and people help you keep your purpose fixed on the Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Steadfast purpose is easier to admire than to maintain. Over time, many things threaten our resolve: gradual drift, discouragement, the erosion of busyness, the weight of trials, the cooling of first love. Faithfulness must be actively maintained, not assumed.

Invite honest reflection. What is threatening my steadfastness right now? Have I drifted in my devotion? Am I discouraged or weary? Has busyness crowded out the Lord? Is a trial testing my resolve? Naming the threat is the first step to guarding against it.

Help students identify what sustains steadfast purpose. The practices God uses, regular time in the word and prayer, faithful gathering with the body, the Lord's Supper, accountability, service, keep our purpose fixed on Him. And the people God uses, encouragers like Barnabas, fellow believers who walk alongside us, strengthen our resolve.

Encourage one concrete step toward steadfastness. Perhaps it is to renew a neglected practice, to reach out to an encourager, to deal with a discouragement honestly, to recommit deliberately to the Lord. Steadfast purpose is sustained not by willpower alone but by staying connected to the Lord and His people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The active maintenance of steadfast purpose
- Common threats to faithfulness: drift, discouragement, busyness, trial
- The means of grace and the body sustaining our resolve
- Encouragers strengthening one another's faithfulness

Discussion Prompts

- What most threatens your steadfastness right now?
- What practices help you keep your purpose fixed on the Lord?
- Who helps you stay faithful, and whom could you help?

Question 9

Student Question:

Luke notes that the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch (v. 26). What is the significance of bearing the name Christian, what does it mean to wear the name of Christ, and how should this shape our identity rather than party or sectarian labels?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it touches the very identity of Christ's followers. At Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians, a name that means belonging to Christ, those who are of Christ. Whether first given by outsiders or recognized within, it is a fitting and honored name, used again in Scripture (Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16), where Peter says, if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Consider what it means to bear the name of Christ. A name signifies ownership and identity. To be called a Christian is to belong to Christ, to be identified with Him, to carry His name before the world. This is a high honor and a weighty responsibility. The name should fit; those who wear Christ's name should reflect His character, for the watching world reads Christ partly through those who bear His name. To bear His name unworthily is to bring reproach on it.

This also shapes how we think about our identity and what we call ourselves. The New Testament gives believers names that honor Christ and describe their relationship to Him and to one another: disciples, saints, believers, brothers and sisters, Christians, the church of Christ, the church of God (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2). What it does not do is divide believers under party labels named for human leaders or distinctive doctrines. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for saying I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, asking, is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:12-13). To wear a party name is to fracture the body and to glory in men rather than in Christ.

So our identity is to be found in Christ, and the names we wear should point to Him, not to human founders, movements, or sectarian distinctives. We are simply Christians, members of the Lord's church, the church of Christ, belonging to Him alone. This is not a denominational claim but a return to the simple, scriptural identity of God's people, undivided, wearing the name of the One who saved them.

Pastorally, help students prize the name Christian and live worthy of it. It is a name to glorify God in (1 Peter 4:16), a name that calls us to reflect Christ in all we do, and a name that unites

rather than divides. To be a Christian is to belong wholly to Christ; let us wear His name, and His name alone, with honor.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christian as the name signifying belonging to Christ (v. 26; Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16)
- Bearing Christ's name as a high honor and weighty responsibility
- Living worthy of the name, reflecting Christ before the world
- Scriptural designations for God's people centered on Christ (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2)
- The rejection of party and sectarian labels that divide the body (1 Corinthians 1:12-13)
- Identity found wholly in Christ, not in human founders or movements
- Glorifying God in the name of Christian (1 Peter 4:16)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to bear the name Christian, belonging to Christ?
- How should wearing Christ's name shape our character and conduct?
- Why does Scripture warn against party labels that divide the body of Christ?

Question 10

Student Question:

When a famine was foretold, the disciples at Antioch each gave according to their ability to send relief to the believers in Judea (vv. 27-30). Looking back over this whole passage, name one specific way the Lord is calling you to grow, in humble submission, steadfast faithfulness, bearing His name, or generous love, and what is one step you will take this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone draws the lesson to a personal response, fittingly anchored in the Antioch church's generosity. When famine threatened, these believers, mostly Gentiles, gave to help Jewish believers in Judea whom most of them had never met. The gospel had made them one family, and family provides for its own. Their generosity was the natural fruit of genuine faith and of the unity of the church across every barrier.

Invite each person to name one concrete step. Perhaps it is to yield to God where they have resisted, to renew their steadfast purpose, to live more worthy of the name Christian, to embrace a more diverse church family, or to give generously to a brother or sister in need.

Keep the focus on the whole-hearted, openhearted faith of Antioch, submitted to God, steadfast in purpose, bearing Christ's name, and generous in love. Transformation looks like becoming this kind of Christian.

Close by reminding students that the same hand of the Lord that was with the believers at Antioch is with them, and that the Lord who gathered Jew and Gentile into one generous family is at work forming them into faithful, openhearted Christians who bear His name with honor.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Generosity as the fruit of genuine faith and church unity (vv. 27-30)
- The church as one family that provides for its own across barriers
- Personal response to the call to submission, faithfulness, and love
- Living worthy of the name Christian

Discussion Prompts

- What most challenged or moved you in this passage?
- What specific step toward submission, faithfulness, bearing His name, or generosity will you take?
- How can this group encourage and pray for you?