

10 Acts of the Apostles

Living Praise Presbyterian Church - Home Cell Group Bible Study Feb-Jul 2001



WELCOMING GENTILES

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Creating Space for Strangers

The first characteristic of the spiritual life is the continuing movement from loneliness to solitude. Its second equally important characteristic is the movement by which our hostilities can be converted into hospitality. It is there that our changing relationship to ourself can be brought to fruition in an ever-changing relationship to our fellow human beings. It is there that our reaching out to our innermost being can lead to a reaching out to the many strangers whom we meet on our way through life. In our world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture and country, from their neighbors, friends and family, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear and where community can be found. Although many, we might even say most, strangers in this world become easily the victim of a fearful hostility, it is possible for men and women and obligatory for Christians to offer an open and hospitable space where strangers can cast off their strangeness and become our fellow human beings. The movement from hostility is hard and full of difficulties. Our society seems to be increasingly full of fearful, defensive, aggressive people anxiously clinging to their property and inclined to look at their surrounding world with suspicion, always expecting an enemy to suddenly appear, intrude and do harm. But still - that is our vocation: to convert the *hostis* into *hospes*, the enemy into a guest and to create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully experienced.

From *Reaching Out* by Henry J. M. Nouwen

Who is My Neighbor

In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), we may see three kinds of attitude.

The first attitude is that of the robbers. Their thinking was: What's yours is yours but what's yours is mine if I can get it. So no matter what you have, if you can't keep it, and if I can grab it, it becomes mine. Ethics is the least of his concern. I grab and take with whatever way I can and if I can get it, ownership changes hands.

The second attitude was seen in the Pharisees and the priests and it goes like this: what's yours is yours but what's mine is mine if I can keep it. I mind my own business and you mind yours.

The third attitude of the Good Samaritan is this: what's yours is yours but what's mine can be yours if you need it. The self-giving attitude of this Samaritan is truly amazing.

Who's your neighbor? And what attitude do you hold when it comes to your relationship with your neighbor?



For a long time, the Berlin Wall that separated the East and West Germany seemed impenetrable, and communism powerful and indestrutable. For seventy years, Christians wondered if Christmas would ever again be openly celebrated in Russia.

Then, dramatically, the wall fell. Communism collapsed. Nations that had been closed to the gospel for years began to welcome Christians, their help and their message with open arms.

The historic breakthrough was like the one the early Christians experienced in this passage. A seemingly impenetrable spiritual wall was broken down. In both situations we see that from God's perspective there is always the potential for reaching every person in all corners of the world with the wonderful news of Jesus Christ.

REFLECTION:

Are you familiar with LPPC's statement of purpose? How important do you think it is for churches to have a written purpose? Explain.

DISCOVERY:

1. Read Acts 10. How did Cornelius prepare for his meeting with Peter?
2. Why was divine intervention necessary to bring Peter and Cornelius together?
3. What lesson did God teach Peter?
4. How did Peter's vision change his view of God and others?

5. What lessons can we learn from Cornelius' life?

RESPONSE:

A. What differences divide Christians today?

B. What issues do you think Christians should not fight over? What issues are worth discussing?

C. What can we do to build a sense of unity in the church?



How many pulpit hours have been wasted on preaching the trivial? How many churches have tumbled at the throes of miniscuity? How many leaders have saddled their pet peeves, drawn their swords of bitterness and launched into battle against brethren over issues that are not worth discussing?

So close to the cross but so far from Christ.

We specialize in "I am right" rallies. We write books about what the other does wrong.

We major in finding gossip and become experts in unveiling weaknesses. We split into little huddles and then, God forbid, we split again....

Are our differences that divisive? Are our opinions that obtrusive? Are our walls that wide? Is it *that* impossible to find a common cause?

"May they all be one," Jesus prayed.

One. Not one in groups of two thousand. But one in One. One church. One faith. One Lord. Not baptists, not Methodists, not Presbyterians, not Charismatics. No denominations, no hierarchies, no traditions. Just Christ.

Too idealistic? Impossible to achieve? I don't think so. Harder things have been done, you know. For example, once upon a tree, a Creator gave his life for his creation. Maybe all we need are a few hearts that are willing to follow suit.

From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado



Topical Study: Gentiles

When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life." (Acts 11:18).

In the book of Acts we are constantly hearing about Gentiles. Who are they? What does the Bible teach about them? Why is so much importance assigned them?

By definition, Gentiles are non-Jewish people - that is, people not descended from Abraham. In the Bible other words are sometimes used for non-Jewish people, such as "heathen," "people," "nations," and "Greeks."

Up to Chapter 12 of Genesis there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. The term "children of men" was then used to refer to the entire human race (eg., Gen 11:15). With Abraham a new and great nation was made by God (Gen 12:2), to be known throughout the ages by such names as "Israelites" (ex 9:7) and "Jews" (2 Kings 16:6).

From Genesis 12 on, the Old Testament has Israel primarily in view - a small but significant stream running from the vast river of the human race. For most of the New Testament after the gospels, Gentiles are the prominent group. The chronology sequence is: 1) children of men, 2) Israel, 3) Gentiles.

1. *Children of men.* World government and leadership was the responsibility of the whole human race. These were the years before the call of Abraham. The children of men failed to honor and obey God, bringing such judgments upon the world as a flood and confusion of tongues (Gen 7-8, 11).

2. *Israel.* The nation was begotten of

Abraham around 2000 B.C. God offered to make Israel the ruling nation of the world, a source of blessing for all others (Gen 12:2-3). The condition imposed was faithfulness and obedience to God. God was long-suffering in granting Israel many opportunities to prove their loyalty and first love. For their rejection of Him, captivities came in 722 B.C. and 586 B.C. with a worldwide dispersion of the remnants in A.D. 70.

3. *Gentiles.* When Israel forfeited its prominent place above all nations, God enlarged the blessings to Gentile nations. The condition was the same as that required of Israel: obedience to God. Would the Gentile nations recognize God as the supreme Ruler? World supremacy was first offered to Babylon (Dan 2:36-39). When Babylon failed to meet the condition and bow in obedience to God, God passed the power on to the Medes and Persians. When they failed, He gave it to the Greeks; and when they failed, it was passed to the Romans. The succession has continued to the present-day, with non-Jewish nations always involved. Israel is not in the picture as such, for Israel is a scattered nation. These are the "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24).

Gentile supremacy will end in the end times (Dan 2:44), God's judgment falling on the world at the time of the second coming of Christ. The divine purpose in this present age is to take out from among the Gentiles a people for His name, the church which is composed more largely of Gentiles than of Jews (see Acts 15:13-17). "the fulness of the Gentiles" mentioned in Romans 11:25 is the completion of this purpose of God in this age. When that time has come for the Gentiles, God will restore the promised kingdom to Israel (see Rom 11).

A Final Thought:

God is respecter of persons. This is supremely demonstrated in His gift offered to everyone: "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life" (John 3:16, *Good News for Modern Man*). This gospel is for Jew and Gentiles alike.

Sources:

Irving Jensen. **Acts - A Self-study Guide.**

Max Lucado. **When God Whispers Your Name.**

Max Lucado. **No Wonder They Call Him the Savior.**