

Open Forum

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[0 : 0 0] What I'd like to do is inform those who are visiting with us that this morning will not be a typical kind of Sunday morning at Grace, because we have devoted this morning hour, as was the case with the 8 o'clock service, to dealing with a number of questions that have been submitted by folks who've been here over the past 11 weeks, who have received 11 hours of material on the subject of progressive revelation in the Bible.

In the midst of that content, you can appreciate that there are a number of questions that have arisen, and I'm sure there are a great many more that we're not aware of, but we'll do the best we can with those that have come in, and then if we have time, we'll open it to questions from the floor.

At the beginning of the summer, we decided that because there is so much absenteeism in the summer months with people going on vacations and whatnot, and because the material coming up in Genesis chapter 12 is so absolutely critical and foundational to all that remains in the Bible, we didn't want it to be interrupted like it is wont to be in the summer.

So we developed a series that we intended would not only have continuity within itself, but for any who may get just one or two sessions, they would be relatively complete in themselves.

And that's how we struck on the subject of progressive revelation, plus the fact that it is such a germane issue and is so critical to understanding the Bible.

[1 : 3 8] And in the midst of that, I have received a number of responses from people verbally and in writing, how much they have appreciated the concepts and how many things have been open to them, and of course there's absolutely nothing that excites a teacher more than a suspicion that maybe somebody has learned something, because the teacher hasn't taught if the student hasn't learned.

And I am a firm believer that when we come here to church, we ought not to have just some nice, sweet little devotional where some religious words are spoken and everybody walks out not knowing anything that they didn't know when they came in.

If we do not learn something, then there is something wrong, because there is so much to know, there is so much to be taught, and no matter how long you live, there is such little time in which to learn it.

And you cannot live out what you have not taken in. That's why content becomes so critical. You have to have information and facts and content with which to operate.

These things constitute the raw materials. They are grist for your mental mill, and you've got to have something to put in here to process and work through, because you make conclusions and you initiate actions on the basis of how you think.

[2 : 5 6] All acting is preceded by thinking. And if we're going to do right, we need to think right. And if we are going to think right, we've got to have the right kind of content. We have got to have truth with which to operate.

And Jesus said, Thy word is truth. Sanctify them through thy truth. Thy word is truth. Consequently, when we gather together here, the more we get of divine perspective and divine viewpoint, the better off we all are.

And the less you get of Marv and the less you get of human viewpoint, the better off we all are. One of the reasons we encourage questions and answers is to help me stay on track.

If I have to be accountable to you for what I teach, that's going to make me more careful and more diligent in what I teach. In most settings, the preacher stands and preaches and he gives you his views and everybody goes home and that's it.

And he has the final word. And if you sit there with questions or doubts or disagreements, tough. There is no forum or platform from which you can voice it. And I think that is a handicap.

[4 : 09] Not only does it tend to cheat people who have questions unanswered, but it also tends to cheat the teacher who does not have the advantage of getting feedback from those whom he has taught.

And it has been demonstrated time and again that I have omitted some pretty important things. that I have said things that need to be corrected, that I have been challenged on points that I could not fully support as much as I thought.

And granted, this involves somewhat an embarrassing feeling on my part, but I feel that I am among friends. And I would rather be embarrassed before you than a whole lot of other people I know.

So that really doesn't bother me at all. If I am proved wrong with something that I say and you are proved right, then I learn from that. And I benefit from that.

And you know me well enough to know, and I know that you know me well enough to know, that I don't have to have all the answers anyway. So I'm not under the pressure of having to know everything and having the answers for everything.

[5 : 19] Because I can just admit fully and freely up front, there is so much that I don't know that it at times gets to be overwhelming. There's more in this book that I don't know than what I do know, I suppose.

And we are all trying to learn and grow and struggle together. We all have blind spots. We all have flawed doctrine. We all have areas that we cannot see and grasp as clearly as we would like or as we ought.

We all tend to have hobby horses and favorite themes that we would ride to death given the opportunity. And when you have an opportunity to make some input, then that helps to modulate things.

And it helps to provide a balance that otherwise would escape us. And I'm glad for it. And I appreciate all the questions that have come in. I'm really grateful for them. Let's get to them, if we may.

I'll do my best to take them, I think, in the order in which they were given. All right. This question regards Acts chapter 8.

[6 : 22] If you'll turn to it, please. The question that is broached is this. Why did Peter and John, as apostles, have to lay hands on the Samaritans?

Was not Philip an apostle? And the account in question begins with Acts chapter 8. And perhaps we should begin with verse 12.

We'll just jump in here. Acts chapter 8 and verse 12. But when they believed Philip, preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, or Jesus the Messiah.

Now, I want you to notice what Philip was preaching. First of all, he was preaching to the Samaritans. And note that he was preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.

They were being baptized, men and women alike. Now, I take it that this was water baptism. I don't have any reason to believe that it was anything other than that.

[7 : 34] And even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip. And as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, and we are not told precisely what they were, but apparently they were of a miraculous enough nature that everybody sat up and took notice.

They knew that what was taking place was extraordinary. And that was quite obvious. They observed signs and great miracles taking place. He was constantly amazed.

Now, when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

For he had not yet fallen upon any of them. They had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

Now, the question that was asked, and it's a good question, is, why was it necessary for Peter and John to come and lay hands on the apostles? After all, wasn't Philip an apostle?

[8 : 52] And the answer is, yes, Philip was an apostle. But this is a different Philip. There are many Johns in the Bible. There's John, the brother of James, the son of Zebedee.

There is John, the Baptist. There are at least three different other Johns that are mentioned in the book of Acts. And they are not to be confused because they are to all different people.

And the Philip, who is the evangelist here that preaches to the Samaritans, is not the same Philip who was one of the twelve apostles as chosen by our Lord. We don't know much about that Philip, except that that Philip, in accordance with John 1, is the one who told Nathaniel, we have found the Messiah.

And Nathaniel says, well, can any good thing come out of Nazareth? And Philip's answer to him was, I'm not going to argue it, just come and see. Come and see. That Philip was one of the original twelve apostles chosen by our Lord.

But this Philip, who is mentioned here, is one of the seven deacons that were chosen to care for the administrative tasks of the widows and to seeing to it that their material needs were met.

[10 : 07] The Philip that is here in Acts 8 is not to be confused with the Philip who was one of the twelve apostles. And the big difference is this, and folks, this is really important. I want to emphasize this.

It's really important. There was a very unique, extraordinary, and exclusive kind of power and authority that was delegated by Jesus to the apostles that nobody else had.

And these apostles did not possess this authority in and of themselves. They were not especially capable. They were not super brilliant. When Jesus chose the twelve apostles, he did not say to himself, let me see now.

I want to find the twelve most qualified, competent, wonderful, uniquely gifted men in the whole wide world. And when I find those twelve, I'll make them my apostles. There's no indication that they would have fit that criteria at all.

These were what we would call very ordinary people. I'm sure they had humble hearts for God. I'm sure they had some spiritual qualities. But after all, they earned their living as fishermen and tax collectors.

[11 : 23] And we have no reason to believe that any of these apostles had a genius IQ. They didn't. They were ordinary, everyday people. But, what made them apostles was the fact that Christ called them.

And Christ gave them authority. They didn't have it. We're told in Matthew 10 that He called these twelve unto them. And He chose these twelve that they might be with Him.

And He gave them authority to cast out demons, to cleanse the lepers, to heal the sick, to raise the dead. And He told them, Go and preach the gospel of the kingdom.

They were uniquely qualified men and they had a special kind of authority given to them. this apostolic authority. Consequently, when Philip went and preached to the Samaritans and they began believing, Philip did not have the delegated authority given to the other apostles so that he could lay hands on these and they could receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now we're getting into some very practical areas and some real differences that divide believers today. There are those today who believe that this apostolic authority is still available and it is to be desired.

[12 : 54] And that if a person is godly enough and diligent enough and praise enough, etc., they will be able to lay hands on others, establish this point of contact, and transfer some kind of esoteric spiritual power or dynamic from themselves to the others through the laying on of hands.

We are of the position that there was a time when that was very valid and very needed and very much a reality. That kind of apostolic authority was given to the apostles by our Lord and it died when the apostles died for the need of it no longer existed.

And we'll talk about that in just a moment. But I want you to note here in our text verse 17, they, that is Peter and John, they began laying their hands on them and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

It's Peter and John who healed the man through the power of God who was the temple gate beautiful and silver and gold. Have I none such as I have? Give I unto you in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Rise up and walk.

It's Peter and John. Peter and John later in the temple. Peter and John later when they are before the authorities and they receive the initial blow of persecution and so on. And they're very, very prominent throughout the first half of the book of Acts.

[14 : 20] Everything centers around these men, Peter and John and the other 12. Little wonder that this document is called the Acts of the Apostles.

That's literally what it means. The doings, the activities of the apostles, the things with which they were so deeply concerned. But one to whom this authority was not given simply could not perform those things.

Christ did not give this authority to everyone. He gave it to those whom he chose. He gave it to the 12. This question. In Acts 10, did Peter preach the gospel of the kingdom to Cornelius?

Would Cornelius have to be baptized under this gospel? And my answer to that, and I've given a great deal of thought to it, and I've worked and reworked and reworked Acts 10 and 11, very important pivotal chapters in the book, having to do with the conversion of Gentiles.

And I am convinced in my own mind, and this is a Wiseman opinion, I don't ask that you share it, but I do ask that you consider it. I am convinced in my own mind that Peter didn't have the slightest idea what to preach to Cornelius.

[15 : 34] He didn't know what to say to him. And you know why? He didn't even know why he was there. Now that might be difficult for you to believe, but I think that's precisely what the text will bring out.

May we begin with Acts chapter 10, and this voice from heaven and the sheet let down from which, in which there were all manner of four-footed animals and crawling creatures and so on, and God is teaching Peter an object lesson here, that he is breaking down the barriers between Jews and Gentiles, and Peter really doesn't understand what's going on.

He is like I am. He is a slow learner. Peter had a very hard head, very difficult to get something into it, and when it got in, it was very difficult to get it out. That's the kind of person Peter was.

And it's so interesting to me. This is such a fascinating chapter. These men have been told by Cornelius, you see, the vision appears to Cornelius, and he says, and God says, Cornelius, you send some of your men to the city of Joppa and go to the house of Simon the Tanner.

This was a man who produced leather goods, and he lives in a house by the sea. All tanners had to have a constant supply of water, and they would locate their tannery near the water. And you'll find Simon the Tanner in his house by the sea.

[17 : 03] There is a man by the name of Simon Peter who is living temporarily with Simon the Tanner. You send your men to get him, and when they locate him, have him come back with them, and when he gets here, he will tell you what you need to know.

So, Cornelius, who is a centurion, a Roman centurion, that means he was a Roman army officer, he had 100 men under his command, hence the name centurion.

He delegates a couple of his men, tells them where to go, they go, knock on the door, Simon the Tanner comes to the door, he asks, what can I do for you? We're here asking after Simon Peter, is there a Simon Peter here?

Yeah, he's here, he's upstairs. I'll go get him. So, he goes up, and Peter comes down, and in verse 21 of chapter 10, he has already been told to go with them.

And Peter went down to the men and said, Behold, I'm the one you're looking for. What is the reason for which you have come? And they said, Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man, well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house.

[18 : 25] And hear a message from you. So, he invited them in and gave them lodging. Obviously, it was late in the day and they decided they would strike out the next morning.

Peter is absolutely perplexed about this whole thing. He doesn't know what's going on. All he knows is he's gotten these messages, one from an angel, and it is confirmed by these men. And he's wondering, I wonder what in the world is going on.

What is this all about? He really doesn't know. But he wants to be obedient. So, here's what happened. On the next day, he arose and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

And on the following day, he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.

Folks, we've got a home Bible study here. Cornelius is a God-fearing man. That does not mean that he was a believer. What it means, it was a special category that was accorded to Gentiles by the Jews.

[19 : 31] There were those, let me just briefly run through this if I may. There were those who were full-fledged Jews. They were born of Hebrew parents. If they were males, they were circumcised the eighth day. Full-fledged Jews born under the covenant, the law of Moses, and so on, and so on, and so on.

Then there were Jews who were Jews because they were proselytes. They were born Gentiles, but they later became converts to Judaism.

And to be a full-fledged convert to Judaism, if you were a male, you had to be circumcised. You had to present yourself before the Lord in Jerusalem. I have a strong suspicion that the Ethiopian eunuch was a proselyte to Judaism.

He probably was a black, an Ethiopian black man who had come to faith in Jehovah as the true God.

And we are told that he had been in Jerusalem to worship. It would not be necessary for any pagan to go to Jerusalem to worship, but it sure would be for a Jew. He was the treasurer of Candace, who was the queen of the Ethiopians, a man who occupied a very responsible position.

[20 : 40] When he was coming back, he was sitting in his chariot reading from Isaiah the prophet and Philip went alongside, struck up a conversation and led him to Christ. He was a proselyte to Judaism.

Then there was another step down the ladder. You know, there were a number of people who were very responsive and very sympathetic to Judaism and they would go to the synagogue and they would frequent the services and they really liked the idea of there being only one God.

and many of them were really taken with the Old Testament scriptures, with the history of Israel, with the power of God as he moved in his people and they were very sympathetic to Judaism but they didn't want to become full-fledged Jews, many of them.

And I'll tell you what the real problem was for the men was circumcision. That would ruin your whole day. And some of them were convicted enough and persuaded enough they wanted to go the whole route and they would have a ceremony and circumcision and they would become a full-fledged Jew.

Then, after they were circumcised, then they could present themselves before the Lord in the temple and no longer would they be confined to the court of the Gentiles. Then they could go into the court of Israel.

[21 : 53] Then they were recognized as a full-fledged Jew and they would have the ceremonial washing or the oblation or the baptism, if you will. into Judaism. And that was a ceremonial kind of cleansing.

This man, Cornelius, was not a proselyte but he was a God-fear. The God-fearers were those who didn't go all the way. They were sympathetic and this man was generous.

He gave much alms to the people. He was sympathetic to Jewish causes. He contributed to the needs of Jewish poor people and he helped them in the erection of a synagogue.

He was a very key strategic man, a God-fearing man but he obviously was not a believer yet he's going to become such. Notice what happened if you will. Cornelius is waiting for them.

They've called their relatives together and close friends and when it came about that Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet and worshipped him.

[22 : 52] That's his first mistake. Peter raised him up saying, Stand up. I too am just a man. You see, Cornelius had heard all about Peter. He had heard that Peter was the chief spokesman of the twelve.

He had heard that Peter was the closest of all the apostles to the Lord Jesus. He had heard that God had used Peter to work many wonderful miracles and when Peter walked in the house, Cornelius, seeing this tremendously imposing figure, this big fisherman and his reputation that preceded him and everything, he just went over and just worshipfully fell down at his feet and Peter said, Hey, come, get up off your knees.

Don't fall down before, I'm just a man. Get up off your knees. As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled.

I'd just love to have seen the expression on Peter's face. He doesn't know why he's there. He's been told to go and he's going out of obedience and he walks into the house of this Gentile and everywhere he looks there's people.

The place is full of people, wall-to-wall people and Peter is wondering to himself, what in the world is going on? Keeping in mind, he doesn't even know why he's here.

[24 : 10] He is there because he's been told to go but he doesn't know what he's supposed to do when he gets there. Notice, as he talked with them, he entered and found many people assembled and he said to them, first thing he says, you yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him.

In other words, what Peter is saying is, you know, I really ought not to be here. I mean, I'm out of bounds. I'm a Jew and Jews are not supposed to associate, to eat with, or to visit with a Gentile lest we become unclean.

So I really don't have any business being here and you will please excuse me if I appear to be just a trifle uncomfortable. I'm not used to these kind of surroundings.

Now, please keep in mind the fact, does this not, does this not accent the fact that Peter's confinement up to this time had been principally to the Jew? He makes a big deal out of even being here, lending more credence to the idea that his ministry has been limited specifically to the Jew, with whom he felt very comfortable.

But now all of a sudden he doesn't feel so comfortable. And he issues a real revelation. He says, Yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.

[25 : 49] That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. And so I asked, look at the question Peter asks, So I ask, for what reason you have sent for me?

Now, if I were there, I would be tempted to say to Peter, you mean you don't know? Peter said, I don't have a clue. I'm just following orders.

I was told by this angel to come. The men were there and they said, come. Cornelius said, that's why I'm here. I was told to come. I don't know what I'm supposed to do now that I'm here. What is it that you want?

Let me impress upon you the fact that Peter is so far removed even from the possibility that God is doing some specific kind of work with Gentiles that the notion doesn't even enter his mind.

Peter seemingly has no idea at all that he is here on spiritual business. and his ignorance is evidence.

[27 : 04] I want you to understand this is not a criticism of Peter. Please don't look at this account and say, well, Peter sure is stupid. He should have understood all of this. He should have known better. He should have realized.

Where is this man? He's out to lunch. What's the matter with him anyway? No, no, no, no. Peter is right on track with where he should have been. He is operating and functioning on the basis of his understanding up to this point.

And there is no reason to charge him with ignorance. That is an irresponsible kind of ignorance. He certainly has some ignorance, but it isn't something that he should have known. He's just following orders.

Cornelius said, verse 30, four days ago to this hour I was praying in my house during the ninth hour and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments and he said, Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.

Send therefore to Joppa and invite Simon who is also called Peter to come to you. He is staying the house of Simon the Tanner by the sea.

[28 : 13] And so I sent to you immediately and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, I love this. I just love this. Now then, Cornelius says, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have commanded, all that you have been commanded by the Lord.

Cornelius says, here's your audience. Boy, we're all here just ready and waiting to hear what you have to say. And Peter says, yeah, yeah, yeah, you sure are.

Now, if somebody would only tell me what it is that I have to say, I would say it. Folks, we are on the verge of a really dramatic breakthrough here and Peter is going to be part of it.

He begins by saying, well, I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears him, and there is a great deal in that word fears, it doesn't mean those who are afraid of God, it doesn't mean that at all, it means those who have a proper respect for him, and does what is right is welcome to him.

The word which he sent to the, oh, look at this, look at this, the word which he sent to the sons of Israel. That is Peter's base of operation up to this point, and that's all he knows about, and that's all he is supposed to know about.

[29 : 51] Preaching peace through Jesus the Messiah, he is Lord of all. You yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed, now what he's talking about here is the life and ministry of Jesus as the Messiah.

From the baptism of John onward, he said, you've heard about it, you know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him, and we are witnesses of all the things he did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, and they also put him to death by hanging him on a cross.

God raised him up on the third day and granted that he should become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with him after he arose from the dead.

Now remember, Cornelius and all of his friends and relatives are all seated there and they're just hanging on every word that Peter's saying. So far he hasn't told them a thing they don't know. Hasn't told them a thing new at all.

They're aware of all this. He's just recounting the history of the life of Jesus. And he ordered us, verse 42, to preach to the people and solemnly to testify that this is the one who has been appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead.

[31 : 22] Of him, all the prophets bear witness that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins.

Because Christ died for our sins. When we believe in Christ we are released from the death penalty of sin. While, Peter, this is the most glorious thing. This is the type of meeting that every preacher would like to be involved in.

It is a meeting in which the Spirit of God just completely takes charge. And that's exactly what happened here.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. who are all those who were listening to the message?

Cornelius, his friends, and his relatives. These people are Gentiles and that's what makes this news.

[32 : 26] The next verse says, And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter from Joppa. No doubt they went along as some kind of protection.

I mean, if Peter is called to go to the house of Cornelius and this man is a Gentile, we don't know what Peter is going to get into there. We don't know what's awaiting him. We don't know what kind of dangers there are lurking. Peter, we're going to go with you.

We're going to accompany you. It doesn't say how many there were, but there were a number and they all go along with Peter and now the Holy Spirit has fallen on this group of Gentiles just like they experienced in Acts chapter 2.

And the people who are absolutely amazed are Jews. This is really different.

The Spirit of God is being poured out on Gentiles. How can that be? This is something that's reserved just for the Jew. They are amazed at the Gentiles receiving this.

[33 : 32] And they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered. And Peter's conclusion to this whole thing is so logical and so consistent and so in keeping with this whole program.

Look at what he says. Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he? And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Then they asked him to stay on a few days. Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had received the word of God.

Big news. Peter came to Jerusalem. Those who were circumcised took issue with him saying, You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them, Peter. Is that what we've been hearing about you?

Shame, shame, shame. And Peter offers his defense and he says, What did you fellows want me to do? Who am I that I could withstand God?

[34 : 37] Hey, I was as shocked as you were that God was doing this with the Gentiles. And the baptism that Peter required for them was just in keeping with this very same program.

and the question, would Cornelius have to be baptized under this gospel? Certainly. Certainly. This was the gospel that Peter was preaching. This is a pivotal passage, folks.

This is a tremendous breakthrough. This is one of the first real steps in the transition that becomes obvious. God is going to do something through Gentiles. No longer is it going to be exclusively limited to the Jew.

The mold begins to break and things are really going to happen from here on because right at this same time, you see, just one chapter earlier, Saul of Tarsus got saved.

That's another real cog in the wheel of this transitional thing. Another highly significant milestone. These two found so close together. Acts 9, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and Acts 10, the conversion of Cornelius are two of the most important chapters in all of the Word of God.

[35 : 49] Don't ever forget that. They are so supercritical, so pivotal, so crucial to all that follows. Question then. Was circumcision required under the kingdom gospel by the apostles who were zealous for the law and who met daily in the temple and so on?

Now, that's a different problem. The question of circumcision never came up with the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom. Why? Follow me now.

The preaching of the gospel of the kingdom was exclusively directed toward the Jew. You did not have to preach circumcision to the Jew who was able to receive and believe the gospel of the kingdom because if he was a Jew, what?

He was already circumcised. It would have been just extraneous to have that as part of the message. There was no point in preaching the kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent and be circumcised.

They were already circumcised. The only proper audience for the kingdom message was the Jew and they were circumcised. Cornelius gets kingdom truth, at least that's what it says here in this verse.

[37 : 04] Where was it? I read it earlier. Acts chapter 10, he preached well, I thought it was there.

It moved. It does that every now and then. Oh, maybe that was yeah, that was another thing I was looking at with the early service. I got my services mixed up here.

Yeah, that was Acts chapter 8 and verse 12. They preached Philip preached to the Ethiopian eunuch the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. And here in Acts 10, he preaches the resurrection of Christ and forgiveness of sins through him.

But where the real problem with circumcision came in was when the Gentiles started believing. Because in order to become a Jew, a man had to be circumcised.

But now these non-Jews have come to faith in a Jewish Messiah as their Savior, don't they also have to become Jews?

[38 : 16] And many of the Jews said, yes, unless you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. And Paul the Apostle said, no.

And they had a great controversy, which is another way of saying a big fight. And they really had at it.

They called a council in Acts 15. They got an official ruling from the elders and the apostles who were there. And their conclusion was, we cannot require Gentiles to become Jews.

They do not have to be circumcised. And that was just such an enormous change. I mean, we cannot identify with this because we don't know the culture and the flavor and the thing that was so predominant and ingrained in these people at this time.

We just don't have a feel for it. We're on the outside looking in and we try to grapple with it, but we can't really put a handle on it. And yet it is so tremendously significant to them. The whole subject of circumcision came about then with the Gentiles.

[39 : 21] Here is another question that we need to treat. If the sign gifts are not for today, what is energizing the manifestations we are seeing?

Is it 100% satanic? There are three possible sources for phenomena or supposed phenomena that are witnessed today that some would say is a manifestation of the Spirit of God.

And I'm talking particularly about speaking in tongues and so-called claims for miraculous healing, raising people from the dead and so on. If these things that some people are witnessing in some religious settings, if these things are occurring, and they are, they have to be rooted in one of three sources.

And I cannot think of any other possibilities. Maybe you can. These things have to originate from God, they have to originate from Satan, and are demonic, or they have to originate from the flesh, and they are of man.

And it is a Wiseman opinion. Again, I don't insist that anybody agree with me, but I really do believe that what is passed off today as speaking in tongues, what is purported to be miraculous manifestations, healings, etc., is really generated by the flesh.

[40 : 57] I do not mean that these people are trying to deceive anyone. I think that they themselves are deceived. I think they have entered into self-delusion.

I do not question their sincerity. I do not question their integrity. I do not question their earnestness for wanting to serve the Lord. I think that these people are under a desperate kind of pressure to demonstrate their spirituality, to demonstrate that God is alive and active in their lives, and they read these things in the New Testament, they read it in the book of Acts, and they think, well, surely God hasn't changed.

If God was powerful and did things like that in the book of Acts, why can't He do the same thing through us today? And if we have the faith, and if we live the life, and if we pray hard enough, we can raise the dead, we can speak in tongues, we can perform miracles, and so on, because God hasn't changed.

And it's true, God hasn't changed. But we contend that God's methodology has changed, that God's modus operandi has changed. It is the Jew who requires a sign.

We are supposed to walk by faith, not by sight. We are not supposed to need miraculous manifestations of anything. God ought not need to do anything to prove His reality to us other than in the Word that He has given us.

[42 : 17] That ought to settle it. God wants to be believed. And if we're going to put Him on trial and say, we'll really believe you're there, and we'll really believe you care if you heal Aunt Tilly of this, if you bring Uncle Frank back from the dead who's stretched out in the funeral home over there, if you'll do these miracles, then we will believe that you are alive and well on planet Earth.

Otherwise, we're not so sure. I think that is a gross, gross mistake. And these people are charismatic friends who are going to be in heaven with you if they love the Lord.

If they know Christ as their Savior, it doesn't make any difference what church you go to, and it doesn't make any difference how wrong you are doctrinally. If you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you're going to be in heaven.

And when we get there, we're all going to get straightened out, including me. But I really do believe that most of this is generated by the flesh. I don't think that these people are demonically inspired.

I don't think that Satan is energizing them. There may be some remote pockets of the world where there is a special kind of darkness and paganism. There may very well be demonic activity there.

[43 : 29] I'm not saying there isn't any in the United States anywhere, but I think that most of these people are sincerely trying to be what they think the Lord wants them to be.

And you can put yourself under enormous pressure to duplicate the things that godly people did in the Scriptures and just assume that that's the way you ought to be operating too. And I think that's where most of that's coming from.

Question regarding Colossians 1.23, and I think that's probably answered more by a little better translation.

It says, The gospel preached to every creature which is under heaven. Does this truly refer to Paul's gospel? Please expand on the every creature portion. I think it does refer to Paul's gospel, but I think what the apostle is saying is a tool of, what shall I say, literary hyperbole, which is used a number of times in Scripture, like John, when he closed out his gospel, said many other signs did Jesus in the presence of his apostles, which are not recorded in this book.

And if they were, I suppose that the world itself should not contain the books that were written. That's an expression of literary hyperbole. And when Paul says here in Colossians 1.23, that the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

[44 : 55] I think he means in a general kind of fashion, and the King James says every creature, which is more literal, but I take it the way the New American Standard has rendered it, and I think it means more generally.

Like we could say today, Jesus Christ as the Savior from sin and the provider of eternal life has been preached all throughout the United States.

And certainly it has. That gospel has. But that does not mean that every living, breathing, single specimen, human being in the United States has heard the gospel. But it has been proclaimed throughout all the United States.

Paul said in Acts 19, I believe it was, so then, he spent two years there, and it says, so then, all they that dwelt in Asia, both Jew and Gentile, heard the word of the Lord Jesus.

And I don't think, again, it means every single solitary individual, but it means the region encompassed a huge area, and Paul's missionary activity certainly took him into a lot of places. Now, here are some observations that I want to relate.

[46 : 01] They are not questions, but they are salient points that need to be made, and I think they are helpful. 1 Timothy 1.16 says, Howbeit for this cause I obtain mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

This surely sets forth Paul's unique position to us in the body of Christ. Well, if words mean anything, it does, and that's what Paul said, and I don't think that anybody has the right to tone them down, when Paul says that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering for a pattern.

Paul set himself up as a divinely appointed pattern in which God was demonstrating his magnificent grace.

Can you think of anyone to whom the grace of God was more abundantly poured out on Paul? And why was it? Why do I say it was so abundantly poured out on Paul?

Why was the grace of God so powerful in the direction of Paul? Because no one on the face of this earth deserved it less. Persecutor of believers hated the very name Jesus of Nazareth.

[47 : 23] You could not find a likelier candidate for the wrath of God, the judgment of God, the retribution of God, the hellfire damnation of God, if you will.

You cannot find a better candidate for it than Saul of Tarsus. Little wonder that he says, I, chief of sinners, chief of sinners, to me, who am less than the least of all the apostles, is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, the very one whom he hated with such vehemence and such passion, and he gives his life over to proclaiming the gospel of this one.

Nobody has so tremendously exhibited the grace of God. You know one thing this ought to do? It surely ought to do this, at least. It ought to completely dispel forever from the mind of anyone, anybody who would have even an inkling, even one smidgen of fear that maybe I'm too bad for God to save.

God wouldn't want me. I've done this, or I've done that, or I've... You... Your track record, however negative, however sinful, however bad, you can't compare with Saul of Tarsus.

He'll outshine you. And Paul said he was a recipient of the gospel of the grace of God. And I think that Paul has set forth as a pattern to say a number of things, one of which is this, is if God could save Saul of Tarsus, there isn't anybody he can't save who will come to him in faith, believing.

[49 : 16] Don't put yourself... Hey, who are you? Who are you to put yourself outside the grace of God?

Now, that's one extreme. You know, there are people who think, I'm too bad, I'm too wicked, I'm too this, I'm too that, I... God wouldn't save me. He wouldn't want me. That's one extreme.

You know what the other extreme is? I'm too nice to get saved. I'm too wonderful the way I am. I don't need to be saved. That's the other extreme.

And both of them will condemn you. 2 Timothy 2.8 says, Remember that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead according to my gospel.

The fact of Christ's resurrection was part of Peter's gospel, Acts 2.24. He charged him with crucifying Christ and then God raised him from the dead. But Paul's gospel reveals many ramifications of Christ's resurrection not revealed to Peter.

[50 : 20] I think that's a given and I think we've seen that. It's quite apparent. Quite apparent. This is an interesting point here. Interesting point. We spent a little time on this. After the death of Judas Iscariot, the eleven sought an immediate replacement for him.

Remember that? And they chose Matthias? Acts chapter 1. So there would be a ruler for each of the twelve tribes in the kingdom age. After Herod killed James with a sword, now that's in Acts chapter 12, and the James that Herod killed is the James who is the brother of John, the apostle, who wrote the gospel of John and so on.

That James was one of the sons of Zebedee. And Herod slew him with a sword. But it's interesting to note. The remaining eleven apparently did not seek to replace him.

Or if they did, there's nothing in Scripture about it at all. It doesn't reveal it. Interesting that they moved quickly to replace Judas Iscariot so that the full complement of twelve would be intact. But when another was killed, there was no effort made to replace him.

At least none that is given in Scripture. Why? Well, it would make perfect sense that he wasn't replaced if they recognized that this transition was underway and that the kingdom that they had been proclaiming over which they were going to be ruling was going to be put on hold.

[51 : 48] And the kingdom is in postponement. So there's no need to replace James. The James who will be ruling one of the twelve tribes of Israel in the millennium will be a resurrected James.

And so will Matthew and Peter and Thomas and all the others. They will rule and reign in resurrected glorified bodies. But that wasn't at all immediately apparent to them then.

But I think it was becoming apparent by this time and that's why they didn't replace him. Interesting account here. As you pointed out in last Sunday's sermon, although Paul baptized some in his early ministry, he doesn't appear to be overly excited for having done so.

Boy, that is true. In a day and age and among many people today who keep very careful records of baptisms and some churches that even compete when they get together at their annual conference, how many baptisms did you have last year?

How many did you have? And they all compare notes, you know. Paul says, I baptized Stephanas in the house of Crispus, was it? I don't know if I baptized any others or not.

[53 : 00] I don't know whether I baptized. That is no way to go about the serious business of baptizing. And then he says, For Christ didn't send me to baptize anyway but to preach the gospel.

And that indicates to me that baptism was losing its importance because it belonged with another message. And the message it belonged with was repent and be baptized for the remission of sins and you shall receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2.38, that was the message they were preaching back then. It's not the message that Paul was preaching. And this last point.

This gospel of the kingdom, Matthew 24 says, shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come. But in Colossians 1.6, the gospel which is come to you as it is in all the world and bringeth forth fruit as it doth also in you.

If the kingdom, if the gospel of the kingdom were Paul's gospel, should not the end have already come? Sure should have. It sure should have. And I think those are all excellent points and I think you will take them to heart.

[54 : 17] Now in closing, I want to give you an overhead view of what is involved in the various commissions and the way the mechanics of this has turned out. Here we have in the beginning the kingdom is promised.

The kingdom that Jesus and the twelve apostles preached is rooted in the Old Testament. Isaiah 2, Jeremiah 23, and Daniel 2.

God through the prophets promises that there will be a kingdom that the seed of Abraham and the seed of David is going to sit on the throne of David judging all of the twelve tribes.

That's the basis of the promise and that's what John the Baptist came on the scene preaching that electrified the whole Jewish community. He proclaimed the kingdom. And that, by the way, is the first great commission.

It is found in Matthew 10 and it is exclusively limited to the Hebrew nation alone. I do not think there is any other way we can read that. That's what it says in plain language.

[55 : 26] Jesus called these twelve. He sent them forth. He says, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, neither go to the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

This is the first commission. It is to the Hebrew nation alone. And what happened? Israel rejected their Messiah after the flesh. That is, in the earthly physical ministry of Jesus when he was here on earth.

Their response was, We don't want this man to reign over us. Crucify him. Crucify him. That was their response to the preaching of John and to the preaching of Jesus. And Jesus prayed from the cross that they would be forgiven.

Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. I think that prayer was answered. I think God did forgive them. Consequently, there is a second commission and it's found in Acts 1.8.

The kingdom is offered because the basis for the kingdom has been accomplished, that is, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. And it is to all nations beginning with Israel. Thou shalt be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth.

[56 : 33] All nations beginning with Israel. That's the second commission. However, when Peter gave them opportunity to repent as a nation and receive the Messiah and God would send him back again, Allah, Acts chapter 3, they not only had rejected the lowly Jesus, that is, Jesus in his humiliation of his earthly flesh, now they have also rejected the glorified Lord in his resurrected body.

When Peter preached him, they rejected again. Consequently, they are set aside in unbelief. And that leads us to the last and the third great commission, which is 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 19.

Here the kingdom is postponed, and our gospel does not go to the Hebrew nation alone. It doesn't go to all nations beginning with Israel. It just goes to all without distinction. It has no national parameters at all.

It is a highly individualistic thing. We are to proclaim the gospel of reconciliation, the gospel of the grace of God to everyone who gives us opportunity, in season and out of season.

There is no strategy as so far as this nation or that nation. It's everywhere, anywhere, anytime. If you go to Africa, you preach the gospel there. You go to China, you preach it. You go across the street, you preach it wherever, to whomever.

[58 : 03] And the kingdom will be established eventually, but the kingdom right now is postponed. Folks, we have no business preaching a gospel of the kingdom when the kingdom is postponed. We preach the gospel of the grace of God.

And the gospel of the grace of God simply says, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. The gospel of the grace of God is that Christ died for our sins, Paul said, according to the gospel, that he was buried, that the third day he was raised again, according to the scriptures.

That's the gospel of the grace of God. You do not work, you do not earn, you do not deserve God's grace, because if you could, then grace would not be grace. It would be on the basis of merit, but it is not on the basis of merit.

God hath concluded all under sin that he might have mercy upon all who believe. And that's the gospel that is preached today. Pray with me, will you please?

Father, we respect the transitions that are involved and the progression of revelation has become obvious when we see these things put together in the acts of the apostles, even as the Spirit of God recorded them.

[59 : 16] We are so grateful that Paul has borne testimony as a personal recipient of your great grace, and we know that there is no sin that is too great, but what it is outside the redemptive work of Christ.

We look to Paul and we know that he is a recipient of your grace means that any and all can be recipients of that grace as well. We pray this morning that anyone who may be here laboring under self-delusion, anyone who may be counting on their own righteousness or their own good intentions, may they see that all of that negates the grace of God.

For if righteousness comes by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. We want no other plea. We want nothing else that we can propose on our behalf other than the Lord Jesus Christ and his redemptive work for us.

If someone is here today struggling with this, we pray that you will speak to them in this closing moment and cause them to know that apart from the righteousness of Jesus Christ, they have nothing to commend them to you.

while we bow our heads and remain in an attitude of prayer, I want to close with a very brief invitation, dear friend. You may have been here many, many times.

[60 : 37] You may have been coming regularly for the past couple of years, or maybe this is your very first time here. God's grace. But the gospel is directed to all of us, and the gospel says we all have sinned and fall short of God's grace, of God's standard, of God's glory.

And God knew that. God knew that we were unacceptable in and of ourselves, and that's why he provided a substitute to accomplish our redemption. And he did that in the person of Jesus Christ.

Christ, and all God wants you to do right now, all God wants you to do right now, is to do.