

"To the Nations Also"  
Pastor Wally Contreras  
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"The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them." Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.' "I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' "The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. "Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.' "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" 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 11:1-18)

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It's been said that when Jesus says something three times, it's important and we need to really, really pay attention (see John 21:15-17). We know from the Scripture that Luke recounted the story of Peter's vision and salvation coming to the Gentiles twice found in Acts 10:9-46 and 11:5-17. He could have as easily just said that Peter told the circumcised believers about his vision. Why do I think that Luke felt the need to tell of Peter's actions twice?

Charles Spurgeon said on September 23, 1855: "One of the greatest obstacles which the Christian religion ever overcame was the inveterate prejudice which possessed the minds of its earliest followers. The Jewish believers, the twelve apostles, and those whom Jesus Christ had called from the dispersed of Israel, were so attached to the idea that salvation was of the Jews, and that none but the disciples of Abraham, or, at any rate, the circumcised ones, could be saved, that they could not bring themselves to the thought that Jesus had come to be the Savior of all nations, and that in him should all the people of the earth be blessed." Do I believe that Christians have truly overcome the prejudiced thinking that there are those in the world today for whom salvation is not possible? If so, how so? If not, why not?

In the text, Luke portrays Peter as a man who is in hot water, who was being called on the carpet for evangelizing to Gentiles. I can almost see these “circumcised saints” greeting him with the words, “You have a lot of explaining to do!” Peter was criticized because he “went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.” Would I react any differently than the circumcised believers if I saw Pastor Wally walking out of a bar at 10 in the evening? Explain.

What if I later learned that a recovering alcoholic had called Pastor Wally and asked him to meet him at the bar because the alcoholic was being tempted to fall off the wagon and need to talk with someone?

Pastor Wally spoke of pushing back on God’s plan referring to it as a “speed bump” because we really can’t stop God from moving forward with His plan. When it comes to sharing the Gospel message with my “Who’s Your One”, what “speed bumps” have cropped up in that effort and why?

The circumcised believers probably had a little issue with pride and self-righteousness. The Gentile believers were being accepted as brothers and sister in Christ instead of proselytes. “A.W. F. Blunt suggest[ed], ‘such is human nature, they may have thought that such cases as that of Cornelius were likely to be few and exceptional, before the Return of Jesus took place, and that a minority of Gentiles on the circumference of the Church might be tolerated, especially as they might possibly in time go on to be circumcised through the influence of the Jewish majority.’ It required, indeed, a major readjustment of all thinking for a people, fiercely conscious of racial privilege and stirred anew by the thought that the Messiah of promise had appeared and spoken, readily to abandon the thought that a unique national destiny approached fulfillment.” (E. M. Blaiklock, “The Acts of the Apostles”, p. 97.) Are there matters in the church today that I have learned to “tolerate” (e.g., music, Bible translation being used)? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally spoke of Gandhi’s attempt to attend a church where the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned. “If Christians have caste differences also,” he said, “I might as well remain a Hindu.” Do I believe Christians have a caste system? If so, how so? If not, why not?

At Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo on December 18, 1963 during a Q&A session with students and faculty, in response to this question: "Don't you feel that integration can only be started and realized in the Christian church, not in schools or by other means?" Martin Luther King said, "We must face the fact that in America, the church is still the most segregated major institution in America. At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing and Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation. This is tragic. Nobody of honesty can overlook this." How accepting am I of people of other cultures, ethnicity, or with other expressions of faith?

Pastor Wally said that "Pride is the source of all conflict." Cancel culture is defined to mean "the phenomenon or practice of publicly rejecting, boycotting, or ending support for particular people or groups because of their socially or morally unacceptable views or actions." The definition does not set out who gets to determine the "socially or morally unacceptable views or actions." Has my pride resulted in me having overtly or covertly, intentionally or unintentionally participated in cancel culture activities when dealing with the lost or those of a different belief? Explain.

The tool for overcoming pride is humility:

Philippians 2:3-4 "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

1 Peter 5:5-6 "Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you."

Ephesians 4:1-3 "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

What area(s) in my life need immediate attention to overcome pride and what are some things I can do or stop doing to combat it?

Pastor Wally's second exhortation tells me to "stop wrestling God for control of [my] life."  
And???