

# Acts 11

## Presenting the Gospel

(How are we to present the Gospel of Grace in a postmodern age?)

See theology file #214

### Introduction:

- How are we to present the Gospel in a pluralistic world so that it is heard and people will believe?
- It is suggested that a postmodern age does not respect the rational explanations of modernity? What does that mean with respect to how we proclaim the Gospel?
- The book of Acts presents a balanced view of apologetics that can be helpful for us in a culture that hears truth in many different ways.

### 1. The Gospel of Grace may not be popular.

*Prepare to face opposition with respect to the Gospel of Grace.*

“<sup>1</sup> Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. <sup>2</sup> And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised **took issue (disputed)** with him, <sup>3</sup> saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

- a. We should note that the Gospel of Grace was an issue for the early church in many places. Paul's letter to the Galatians addresses this issue.
- b. We should not be troubled by the fact that the Gospel of Grace will be challenged by devoutly religious and God fearing people.
- c. If you need to be popular with the masses, Christianity is not a wise choice.
- d. Some popular objections to the Gospel of Grace from within religious circles.
  1. "Where grace abounds so will sin abound." In other words, "Grace is dangerous in that it encourages loose moral living."
  2. "We fear that the fear of God will be diminished if we embrace radical grace." In other words, "Grace leads to a disrespect and lack of fear in our relationship with a holy God."
  3. "We have a vested interest in the control that the status quo provides us." In other words, "Grace takes away our ability to control our social environment."
- e. There is strong impulse in nearly all humans to want to claim some merit from our distinctive moral disciplines or cultural distinctives.
- f. American evangelical's issues that may be threatened by grace – drinking, altar calls, dress codes, political affiliations, schooling preferences, baptismal modes, prophetic systems, worship styles, etc.

### 2. The Gospel of Grace must make

*Defend the Gospel of Grace with reason.*

sense.

4 But Peter began {speaking} and {proceeded} to explain to them **in orderly sequence**, saying, 5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me, 6 and when I had fixed my gaze upon it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air. 7 And I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Arise, Peter; kill and eat.' 8 But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' 9 But **a voice from heaven** answered a second time, '**What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.**' 10 And this happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky. 11 And behold, at that moment three men appeared before the house in which we were {staying,} having been sent to me from Caesarea. 12 And the Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. And these six brethren also went with me, and we entered the man's house. 13 And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, 'Send to Joppa, and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; 14 and **he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved**, you and all your household.' 15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as {He did} upon us **at the beginning**. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 If God therefore gave to them the same gift as {He gave} to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, **who was I that I could stand in God's way?**" 18 And when they heard this, they quieted down, and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance {that leads} to life."

- a. Peter's defense is based upon personal experience, historical facts, the Word of God, and logical reason.
- b. While it can be said that rational defense of the Gospel is less convincing in a postmodern culture, it cannot be said that it has no power or place. (Review notes on Acts 9:20-43 and note **Acts 17:2,17** "And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures. Explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead.")
  1. The sermons in Acts appeal to reason, empirical evidence & Scripture.
  2. There seemed to have been a great diversity in style and material depending upon the cultural context (17:16-31).
  3. The Apostles seldom appealed to their changed lives or circumstances for Israel as a validation of their message.
  4. Their preaching seemed to assume a rigorous intellectual engagement with the message.
- c. The letters of the NT are written in a rational way with logical arguments that the reader is expected to follow. Rom.6:1; 12:1; Eph.4:1; Isa.1:18

- d. *“At the beginning”* (vs.15) is a reference to Pentecost. The beginning of the New Covenant community, the church, the Body of Christ, the age of Grace, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, etc.
- e. *“The repentance that leads to life”* is equated with turning from faith in the Law and personal moral discipline to faith in the merit of Christ for all who believe. The issue in Acts is not obedience to the Law but faith in Christ.

**3. The Gospel of Grace can win the heart of man when it is preached.**

***Declare the Gospel of Grace with boldness.***

19 So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and {began} **speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.** 21 **And the hand of the Lord was with them,** and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 And the news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. 23 Then when he had come and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and {began} to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain {true} to the Lord; 24 for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. 25 And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came about that for an entire year they met with the church, and taught considerable numbers; and the **disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.**

- a. The Gentiles were coming to faith as a result of 1) the hand of the Lord being with those who 2) preached the Lord Jesus.
- b. There is power to bring people to faith in the bold proclamation of the Gospel.
- c. In verse 21 it suggests that people first *“believed”* the Gospel message and then *“turned”* to the Lord (in faith). This suggests that intellectual acceptance must be accompanied by repentance (turning from trust in something other than Christ to faith in Christ).

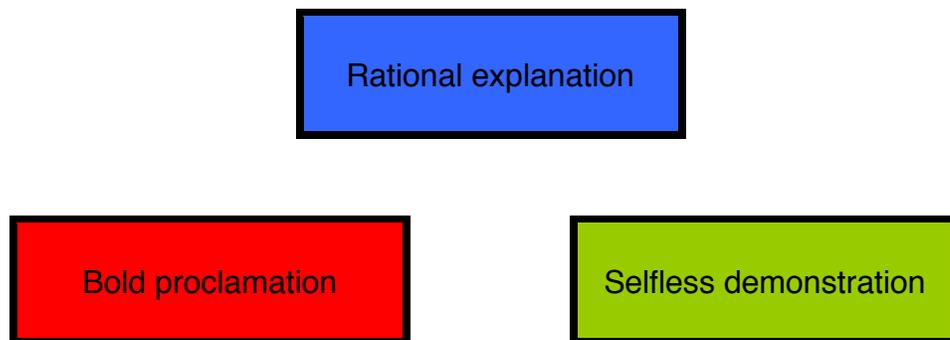
**4. The Gospel of Grace must be seen as well as heard.**

***Demonstrate the Gospel of Grace with love.***

27 Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 And one of them named Agabus stood up and {began} to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the {reign} of Claudius. 29 **And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means,** each of them determined to send {a contribution} for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. 30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.”

- a. Modernity tends to place too much confidence in a rational defense of the Gospel.
- b. Postmodern culture tends to place too little confidence in a rational explanation. In reality a comprehensive approach is needed and illustrated in this text.

***A Christian apologetic starts with a rational explanation but does not end there.***



- c. There is a danger in giving too much attention to the subjective power of self-sacrifice and zeal in our search for the truth.
  - **Rom.10:2** “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.”
  - **Gal.1:8** “But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”
  - **I Cor.12:2** “You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the dumb idols, however you were led.”
  - **Eph.4:14** “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”
- d. There is also a danger in giving too much attention to human wisdom.
 

**I Cor. 2** “<sup>1</sup> And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. <sup>2</sup> For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. <sup>3</sup> And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. <sup>4</sup> And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

<sup>6</sup> Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; <sup>7</sup> but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden {wisdom,} which God predestined before the ages to our glory; <sup>8</sup> {the wisdom} which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; <sup>9</sup> but just as it is written, “*Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And {which} have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him.*” <sup>10</sup> For to us God revealed {them} through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup> For who among men knows the {thoughts} of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the {thoughts} of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know

the things freely given to us by God, <sup>13</sup> which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual {thoughts} with spiritual {words.} <sup>14</sup> But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. <sup>15</sup> But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. <sup>16</sup> For *who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him?* But we have the mind of Christ.”

Note: The wisdom of this age and the wisdom of God share some things in common and also have some distinctive differences.

### *Two types of Wisdom*

#### *“Wisdom of this age”*

#### *“Wisdom from God”*

##### *Common characteristics*

- Skeptical inquiry
- Critical evaluation
- Logic and reason
- Community review

##### *Distinctives*

- |  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| • Godless fear                           | • Fear of God & Faith             |
| • Narrow presuppositions                 | • Open presuppositions            |
| • No expectation of the Spirit of Christ | • Faith that the Spirit will lead |
| • Humanistic philosophy                  | • Prayer                          |
| • Scientism or superstition              | • Scriptural authority            |
| • Desire to know only                    | • Desire to know and obey         |

- e. The Holy Spirit works behind the stage in bringing people to faith. Vs.21  
“And the hand of the Lord was with them”

***People come to believe through a complex, personal, process.***

