



Unified Church – Part 1
Scriptural Reasons & Reasonable Explanations
Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, there have been countless movies and dramatic TV scenes where there is depicted an airline flying at 30,000 feet and some unsuspecting passenger is called up from the back of the plane into the cockpit where the perspiring passenger is now given the sobering responsibility of landing the plane. We've all seen that. The perspiring passenger is been given the responsibility to make sure that all these passengers land safely and of course he has to grab the headset and then the tower talks to this untrained non-pilot who's having to pilot and, you know, he gets a crash course in landing the plane, which I realize is a terrible choice of words.

But there are weekends like this one where we need a crash course in not crashing. And by not crashing, I don't mean a Boeing 747, but I'm talking about crashing a Columbia 150. That's our address. Uh, yeah. And I'm not talking about, you know, slamming into a tarmac at 180 miles an hour. I'm talking about when we as a church hit a brick wall of dissension and factions and relational conflicts and church splits that have the same kind of emotional, fiery end because there's all of this conflict that is not properly resolved. God said in Psalm 133, "How good and pleasant it is for the brothers to dwell together in unity." And most of you have been around the Christian life long enough to know how bad and unpleasant it is when the brothers are dwelling together in church with disunity.

And it's important for us to realize that this is not just a pleasant thing when we're unified, but how good and pleasant. It's a good thing, which means it's a bad thing when we don't have it and we need to think about the moral bad that it is. We need to think about the practical bad that it is. We need to think about the reverberating bad that it is when we can't get unified under the roof of our church. This is a problem. It's a big problem. Matter of fact, the Bible says when it's not happening, you need to think about it not comporting with biblical Christianity. As Ephesians 4 says, "We ought to walk in a manner worthy," of the Lord, worthy of the gospel worthy, "of what we have been called to." And then it goes on to talk about all these ingredients of relational harmony, and then it ends with this, "You ought to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

And I just wonder, you know, how eager you are to maintain that? I want you to leave today more eager to maintain that and to know how much is at stake, not just how pleasant it would be if your church and your small group and your sub-congregational group in this church are unified, but how good it is and how much bad we will avoid. And if you don't know how to manage conflicts when they come up, when they happen, when there are disagreements and criticism and hurt feelings, well then we're just setting ourselves up for a crash and I don't want you to have that happen. You say, "Well, what's with the, you know, unskilled pilot called up from the back analogy all about, I don't get it?" OK, well, let me help you with that.

Christ in Acts 1 went in the ascension to be enthroned at the right hand of the Father. He left them. He said he was sending his Spirit and the Spirit primarily in the Upper Room Discourse



was that they would have the ability to recall to mind the things that Jesus had taught. Of course they would be in a special class of people, the apostles, who would be prophetic in their writings and record for us this 27-book library of the New Testament. But Jesus was gone. Jesus was gone. And so it's like we have to put the headset on and communicate with the tower. Christ is ensconced in the tower and he wants to communicate what it's going to take, the steps to get the plane down safely whenever you hit these turbulences of relational conflict in the church. We've got to listen to what he says, and that's why sermons like this are important.

We have been working our way through Acts, we've spent many weeks looking at all that Luke has to say that God has to say about the conversion of Cornelius, which would be this landmark watershed moment of the inclusion of the Gentiles in not just someone coming into Jerusalem, but the Jewish apostle, the senior pastor of the church at Jerusalem, going to Caesarea, a Roman port and winning a centurion to Christ, along with all the people who were under his roof that day. That was huge and it had such an inflammatory effect. So many people were just outraged by the thought that he would even go and be in their house, let alone share the message of the Jewish Messiah. It was a hard thing to process, and it caused conflict. It produced criticism. It produced really the potential of splitting the early church in half.

And yet we see Peter, of all people, a fisherman from northern Galilee. Right? He had to navigate this by recalling what Jesus had said, carefully working his way through this conflict. Now, I will admit that reading the first 18 verses of Acts Chapter 11, it's going to sound a little bit like a sitcom, right? You know, like *The Brady Bunch*. I mean, the problem is introduced and then here you have the conflict and then in due time, you know, Mr. Brady comes in and everything is solved by the end of the episode. And were it to work like that, we would be pleased. And I want to lay down the template knowing there are exceptions to this, but this is the pattern we need to follow. There are so many biblical principles that support this.

So take your Bibles and let's see if we can learn how to better manage the kinds of conflicts that are sure to arise. And you may say, "Well, I'm glad we're past the whole Gentile inclusion debate." Matter of fact, you might say it's so good we don't have debates in the modern church anymore. Masks, vaccines, public school, private school, Calvinism or Arminianism, Pre-Mil, Post-Mil. A-Mil, Pre-Trib, Post-Trib, sprinkling, immersion, baptism, boycotts, school board meetings, sick-outs, sit-ins. I'm just glad we don't have any of that going on in our day. (audience laughter) Christians have never been more united than they are right now. We've got plenty. Though it may not be on the level of Gentile inclusion, it doesn't mean that there is not some serious turbulence. Your Diet Coke just spilled all over your tray table. Right? And God may be calling you up to get in the cockpit and do something about it. Some say, "No, I'm not a leader of the church. You should preach this to the leaders of church." Well I am preaching to the leaders the church. But you at least have to manage yourself. You have to manage your family. You have to have a positive, calming, peacemaking effect on your small group. You have an influence here. So you're going to navigate this along with the rest of us.



So let's get in this text and read it. Though the subject is different, the effect is the same and we've got to learn to solve it the way that Peter solved it here. While there are exceptions and sometimes the church does split and sometimes there are relationships that are severed, let's make sure they're severed and churches split for the right reasons, if in fact that has to happen. Acts Chapter 11, I'm going to read the first 18 verses. So much of this is familiar to you because if you've been in our series, you've been learning all about Cornelius, his conversion, and we even have it recited here, which is part of the strategy, by the way, not only of Luke, as the Spirit of God tries to convince the readers of Acts that this is the right thing, but even as Peter repeats this, it's an important strategy as he tries to solve the problems.

Let's read it together beginning in verse 1. "Now the apostles," I'm reading from the English Standard Version. "Now the Apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea," southern Israel, "heard the Gentiles had also received the word of God," through their pastor no less. "So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him." Circumcision party, by the way, you Bible students, you know that sometimes that phrase, the circumcision groups, circumcision parties, and this is not some kind of, you know, card-carrying member of the circumcision. This is not talking about the Judaizers or, as Paul put it disparagingly "the mutilators of the flesh." We're not talking about those who are opposing Christ in the gospel. They're pro-Christ. They're pro-gospel. They're all about the gospel. We know that by verse 18. That phrase is used about different groups.

This particular group just happens to be the Jewish people within that church who were just offended by the fact that there was Gentile inclusion. They didn't even like the fact that their pastor spends any time breaking bread with the Gentiles. So that's how that phrase is used here. And they say, here's the key word "criticized him." And again, you know that that is the cause of so much struggle within the church as two different sides of one singular issue on two different sides, they begin to criticize each other for holding the other opinion. There are sincerely held religious and biblical convictions that people are disagreeing about. And we want to find this harmonized solution that we find at verse 18, but let's at least read more of the problem.

They said, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." OK, so that's the problem. We don't want to like this. "But Peter began and explained it to them in order." And again, you say I've heard all this. It's part of his strategy. "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending being let down from heaven by its four corners and it came down to me. Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and," Gentiles... and reptiles/gentiles, "reptiles." That was the point of the vision, by the way. I read that wrong in two services now, and I did not mean to do that, literally did not mean to do that. Honest mistake. It was filled with Gentiles. No, it was filled with "reptiles" in part. But that was the point. "And birds of the air.

And I heard a voice saying, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' This happened three



times, and all was drawn up again into heaven." Verse 11, "And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea and the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction." Now, I know they're uncircumcised. They're Romans, they're Roman servants of a Roman centurion. I get that. "These six brothers," right? We can safely assume these were the Jewish members of the church who were on this missionary journey that they were going on to the coast, to Joppa, "They accompanied me," they went with me, and you accused us of entering their house. Yes, we entered the man's house.

"And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house," which is interesting, right? God's dispatching an angel to his house and we went in the house too, right? And the angel said to Cornelius, "Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; and he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved," which was the whole concern of the early Church, this missionary evangelistic concern. Well, the problem is that this is a Gentile. This is a Roman of all Gentiles, right? Think about this. So yeah, that's what the angel said to him.

And went on to say, "not only you, but everyone in your house, all your household. As I began to speak," I went and started actually giving them the message that could get him saved, "the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning." Which we saw just briefly at the end of last week's study that they had this miraculous reflection of the kind of thing that happened in Acts 2. So what happened next to all those who were there at the festival of Pentecost. So all these Jewish people traveling from the Diaspora all over the ancient world, they were coming in here and worshipping, and the Jewish people were there, they were celebrating the feast of Pentecost and God saved them and gave them a miraculous sign, a visible sign. They heard a rushing wind. And then here was this gift to be able to speak in languages that they hadn't previously learned.

And that gift it says we saw it repeated. "The Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning, and I remembered the word of the Lord, and how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" And we saw that that's exactly what happened to us and there was a physical, miraculous manifestation of that. And we saw that there. That's how Chapter 10 ended. "If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ," then come on, guys, "who was I to stand in God's way," right? God set this up. God arranged it. Here's what happened. Let me give you all the details of it, and that is what happened. And I remembered what the Lord had said.

"When they heard these things they fell silent," which is not about the decibels in the room, that's not the point. The point is they stopped criticizing it. They gave up the argument. They said, you're right. "They glorified God." OK, this is a God-thing. We see it. We honor God, we're about God's glory, we're about God's honor. "Then," here's their quote, "to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." So I guess God has saved them, given them the same Spirit he's given us. They're fully in. They're complete brothers in Christ under the lordship of our Jewish messiah. They've repented, they've trusted in him, and they're in. OK.



There is a conflict that is described to us in this text, translating a word that it's a good translation that translates into English, "criticized." Criticized them because they had an honestly held, sincere belief that that was a problem to do what Peter and his gang were doing. They didn't think it was right. And they were not only, you know, reading the scrolls of the Old Testament and believing there was a reason for the kind of exceptionalism of Israel, but they were in the church, they were followers of Christ. They had a problem with this and they were sincere about the problem. And of course, Peter is responding to what God was clearly showing him and fulfilling the promise of Christ and fulfilling the promise of Abraham. And so here we have two different views on an issue where Christians are trying to see this the right way and it creates conflict, and you ought to always expect that. And Christians who care about what God says and what God wants, you're going to have Christians with sincerely held beliefs that are in conflict with each other.

If you're taking notes, number one, you ought to "Expect Christian Disagreements" and they're going to disagree. They're going to disagree about eschatology, soteriology, about how the church functions, about church discipline, about issues of working out our sanctification, the raising of our children, issues like we're dealing with in our culture as it relates to what we've just been through in the last two years. All of that is going to be an issue of conflict, conflict, conflict. There's going to be conflict because there are sincerely held beliefs that are in conflict. It's called disagreement. And the disagreement is often going to be whether you want to dispassionately state it as criticism or even add some of the emotion that goes with that word so often, there's going to be criticism, and that's going to be hard. It's going to be a struggle.

And before we get to Peter responding to that criticism, I just want to step back and say, well, the first principle in dealing with this, and we're going to get to that in earnest when we start in verse 4, but we need to realize what it is that we should be engaging in, debating. If we're going to disagree, what should we be disagreeing about? And that's one of the hardest things. And as I prayed for you in this message and prayed for myself in preaching it to you clearly and not, you know, weaponizing this passage for some kind of damaging effect as you take it and say, great, I'm ready to engage in disagreement and let me try and do it the way that Peter did it. I want to make sure that you know the first principle of dealing with disagreement in the church and among Christians is knowing what's worth even debating.

OK, so I want to turn you back to Proverbs, and I want to look at a couple of proverbs that I think will be helpful for us as we deal with the issue of making that decision. If you've been with us in our study, you might remember when Paul came from Arabia, Northern Arabian, to the Damascus Desert. He came to Jerusalem and they didn't want to receive him into the church. And we talked about how that must have been an emotive rejection and there was an issue of disagreement and Barnabas stepped in and solved that. And we talked about just briefly in that sermon how we need to think about most of what we disagree about and realize most of it should go into the category of you shouldn't be debating it. And that's true. You've got to know there are so many things that fall into this category. And I think this passage may help you in Proverbs, a couple of them real quick.



Let's talk about Proverbs Chapter 17. Let's start there. Just two proverbs, we could go to several, but this is helpful and an image that I hope you recognize that once you start in the criticism, you start in the disagreement, you need to know it's going to open up, as we would say in our verbiage, it's going to open up a can of worms. But this is a better analogy, actually. "The beginning of strife," this is Proverbs 17 verse 14. Proverbs 17:14, "The beginning of strife is like letting out water." Now, I'm not sure what the writer had in view here, but I always envisioned when I read this passage watching one of the videos on YouTube where the guy in some country backyard, they're always big backyards, they have that above ground pool and apparently they're going to try and replace it or whatever. He pulls out his pocket knife and he takes the side of that vinyl on the pool that's filled to the top and he cuts a little hole in it. Have you seen that?

They're usually on, you know, these funny videos, because what does it do? It sweeps them away into their giant 10-acre yard. You see that experience of breaching that pool. And that's the picture here of like, you're just letting out water and here's the thing about water, right? It's going to keep coming. It's heavy, it's intrusive. It's invasive. You're breaching the dam. So you need to know when it's a good idea to do that and when it's not a good idea to do that. And a lot of times it's not a good idea to do that when you're looking ahead to see what this is going to cause, what kind of damage it's going to cause. Most people aren't thinking about that as they're taking their pocket knife and trying to put a little tiny hole, a little slit in the side of the pool because it's just going to open the floodgates. And the next phrase in this proverb says, so quit, quit, it's a great little command for us. Just stop. Put your pocket knife away, right? Quit before the quarrel breaks out.

Now, if you are in your small group and someone comes and says, "I want to set up a shrine to Satan in our small group." And you say, "Well, we just heard a sermon about just dropping the matter. I don't want to start. I don't want to start a debate, OK. I just want peace." That's a peace at any price kind of person. Extreme example. I hope you say, "I object." I mean, it's something you should at least say, "I don't think the altar to Satan is needed." I mean, you need to deal with that. So this doesn't apply to everything, and I'll try to give you some kind of criteria. But let's just start with this. A lot of things fall in this category. Would you agree with that? A lot of things just need to drop it. Just drop it. Just stop it. I love it, quit, just quit. I'm not going to engage in it.

Here's another one, I think this is even more powerful. I think I quoted this briefly in the Barnabas/Saul Church of Jerusalem sermon. It's in Chapter 19, Proverbs Chapter 19. Look at this one with me, please. Verse 11. A great proverb for us. Two words here at the beginning of this phrase that I hope that you want applied to you, "good sense." Wouldn't it be good for God to look at you and go, "There's one of my kids with good sense right there."? I'd like God to pat me on the head and say, "Mike's got good sense." The proverb says, "Good sense makes one slow to anger." OK, so I know this. Someone criticizes me, what's the emotional response? I just I'm going to... That's just going to... I mean, that's just the natural response. Poke me in the eye., my eyes are going to water. Do you want to criticize me? It's just a natural response. Would it be good for me to be kind of like building up some resistance to that? It would be good sense for me to be slow to get angry, right?



"And it is his glory." It would be a good thing not only for God to say, "Oh, that guy's got good sense." It would be great for God to say, you know, I probably use different words if I'm going to take it as a big compliment, but glory, glory, glorious gravitas. There's a strong Christian right there. Good sense, "slow to anger and glory." What's glory? To overlook an offense. Just drop it. Let it go. And I would say, and I'm throwing numbers out, I don't know, I guess I've got more experience maybe in the ministry than you, but 90%, maybe more, of the things that Christians are in conflict over and their feelings are bent out of shape and there's struggle and there's strife and there's disunity in a small group, in a ministry, in just two families in the church, oftentimes 90%. I don't know, I'm just throwing it out. That's just a round number. A Mike Fabarez guestimate. I'm going to say, drop it. Just let it go.

You say, "How do we know when to drop it? Peter didn't drop it." You're right, Peter didn't drop it. Now you're probably not dealing with the theology of Gentle inclusion in the Church in your conflict. But I will say this and there is one of the impossibilities of the sermon to try and give you some kind of grid that will help you take whatever your issue is and say, "Is it worth debating? Is it worth solving? Is it worth getting into some kind of disagreement or do I just let it go?" Let me at least give you a spectrum and somewhere there's a line there and there are other factors involved, but let me just give you a spectrum that might help. OK? And we use this in our family, and it's a good thing for us just as a basic principle. And I probably shared it with you before, but here it comes again. OK.

There's the difference between issues that are affecting my honor and issues that are affecting God's honor. And that's a spectrum, and we need to know like when we need to get engaged. When Moses came down from the mountain and saw them dancing around the golden calf, right? Did he say, "Ah, overlook an offense? Just quit, quit before quarreling. I don't want to get an argument with Aaron. Come on. I know how he is," right? Think back to the beginning in Exodus, right? "He's a good talker and I'm not a good talker, so I don't want to argue with him." It's just like breaching the dam. It's like tearing open an above-ground pool. I don't want to do it."

Now, do you know what he did? Oh, man. I mean, it's like settle down Moses. He comes down, first of all he breaks the tablets. Oh man. Oops. That's not a good thing. And then he grinds the golden calf down into powder and makes them drink it. That's not overlooking an offense right there is it? But wouldn't you say he was indignant over God's honor in that? Numbers Chapter 12. It says they "criticized Moses because of his Cushite wife." OK? Do you know that passage? They're criticizing him, they don't like the choice of his wife. Now if there's something that should make you indignant, I don't know, that might make you angry. Talk about being slow to anger, I'm going to need to be slow to anger if that conversation comes up. Right? It's really bad.

And this came, speaking of Aaron, from Aaron and Miriam, his brother and sister. Do you know what he did? Do you think that he ground anything up and make Aaron drink it? No. He did nothing. His response was to overlook it. "Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it was his glory to overlook an offense." Why? Because that was all about his honor. Now in that



passage, surprisingly, and it's interesting and not surprising, I suppose, it comports with the whole thing. He was described by God as having the most humble attitude in his generation, "not a more humble man on earth." Humility, the sense that this is about me, it's not about God's honor. Peter is not here going you "criticize me, I'm going to tell you why I went to their house" and he's not reacting defensively about a personal attack. He is really concerned with the honor of God because Christ had said something about the baptism in the Spirit and about the inclusion of all the nations. So he was going to deal with that.

Moses didn't deal with it when they criticized the ethnicity of his wife. He let it go. And this sometimes happens when you don't defend your own honor because you're trying to be a son who has good sense and is glorious, right? Do you remember what happens in Numbers 12, Sunday school grads? God steps in and defends his honor. That's a good thing because anyway when you're dealing with the emotions of being criticized, sometimes you just need to do exactly what it says in Scripture. You just need to turn this all over to God and trust yourself to a faithful creator, a judge who's going to deal with everyone else. Don't take your own vengeance. He doesn't deal with it, and God steps in and deals with it, and he ends up in the end even praying for his brother and sister because God was disciplining them.

So an amazing example of the two extremes of Moses getting really mad and getting engaged. So much so that you're thinking, "Slow down, Moses. Don't make them drink it," right? I mean to, "I'm not going to say anything about this." I just think on that spectrum, let's just start with that. We need to expect disagreement, but the disagreement involves two people. I always say in marital counseling, whatever, you know, a good argument takes two people. Any argument takes two people. And so I can't argue with myself. Well I can but it's not the kind of argument you're thinking of. So the reality of me in my life, I got to start making decisions about what's God's honor and what's my honor.

That's why when you take God out of the equation, you start to get statements like this in First Corinthians Chapter 3. Conflicts in the church of Corinth, God says, "I got to treat you like you're just fleshly." It's a weird way to put it. It's like you're just mere humans. You're just normal people. This is like, I'm dealing with the Rotary Club here. I can't even address you as spiritual because it's like you don't even have a sense of God's honor in it. You're all upset about the divisions within the church based on personalities and factions, you have all these opinions. You're disagreeing about opinions about things that really are... It's like, I have to inject the God honor thing.

Read sometimes the last paragraph called the doxology of Romans Chapter 16 and see the things that Christians ought to be concerned about, which is the glory of God. We ought to be concerned about whether God's honor is at stake. We want people to obey God. We want people to honor God. We're concerned when God gets offended. And that's why Paul says, I look at the divisions in the church, and so many of them are based on your group and your group and it's like, the God-factor is not there. It's like we're part of some motorcycle club or something and it's about our hobbies. It's not about the glory and greatness of God. That's what we should be living for is the glory of God.



So on the spectrum, I just want you to think about the fact that we've got to expect disagreements, but disagreements that you're going to engage in, have to be the disagreements that really are important. And 90% of them, I'm just going to say as a rough round number, they're not. But when they are, then you've got to get engaged. You've got to engage. Jude, a little one-chapter book right before Revelation, Jude verse 3. Jude says, "I wanted to write you about our common salvation." It would be like me coming to your small group this week and going, "I'd love to talk to you about all the things we agree on." And Jude says, but instead, "I realize I've got to talk to you, in this case Jude has to write them, "I need to write you to contend earnestly for the faith." I need you to deal with the disagreement. I need you to disagree. Why? Because "people have crept in secretly" and people need to realize that and they're turning the grace of God, they're blasphemy God by "turning the grace of God into a license to sin." So there's something going on here in this group and it needs to be corrected. And Jude says, "you got to deal with it, you have to disagree." So you have to engage in the disagreement.

So I want to start with that. Principle number one is you ought to expect it. And the whole point of what kinds of disagreements we're going to have need to be categorized and itemized and that's hard to do. Sometimes, you know, you can't do it with a formula. You really ought to sit down with the topic and go, I need some good Christian counsel here to see if this is even worth bringing up. But don't rush into any disagreement in the church. "Don't Rush Into Any Disagreements." You've got to sit back and say, OK, well, let's figure this out. Where is it on the spectrum? What is this about? When do I engage?

Our passage, back to our text, Peter engagers, right? They criticize him, verse 2, and the criticism came in verse 3. "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them. But Peter began and explained it to them in order." And here comes all the explanation again. We've heard this, but here it comes again. He explains it clearly to them and gives them an orderly sequence of events. Now before we even talk about the strategy of Peter, I want us to talk about how he does it, which differentiates itself from something we always have to avoid. You've heard the old phrase you should disagree without being disagreeable, well there's something biblical to that. There's a concept in Scripture where you've stepped out of biblical disagreement and resolving biblical conflicts to something that God says is always wrong.

So let's talk about that first under Letter "A." But first let's give this a heading number two. We need to "Resolve Conflicts Biblically." When you should engage in the disagreement I want us to say, well, here's one way you never want to be a part of this. Never. Right? You can never see this as degenerating into what this word is in the Bible, because throughout the Bible it is always utilized as a bad thing. Ready? Letter "A." "Never Be 'Quarrelsome'." Quarrelsome.

Now, once you write that down, I need you to turn with me to Second Timothy and I need to look at a passage with you in Chapter 2 that will help define what that means. How do I differentiate godly disagreement that we're about to analyze Peter doing and the thing the Bible calls being quarrelsome? Well, there are some great words and explanations for you in this passage. Let's figure that out. You say, "I think I should deal with this. I have to disagree



about this. This needs to be an issue with these people because I can't have peace because this is an important issue, it's a God-honoring issue. I've got to deal with it." Well, great.

If you have to deal with it just make sure, number one, Letter "A" you do not become a quarrelsome person. OK. Verse 23 Second Timothy 2, follow me. Look at it carefully. "Have nothing to do with foolish or ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels." OK, so that's kind of like a repeat of what Mike was just saying here in the first part of this, Pastor Mike saying, listen, here are things that aren't worth quarreling about, and he calls them "foolish and ignorant." They're plenty of things I shouldn't. And I know that if I engage in those things, all it is is this thing that turns ugly and it's called in the passage "quarrels." And the thing about me is if I'm going to be the Lord's servant, verse 24, I must not be quarrelsome, "And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome."

Now, what does it look like to disagree and not be quarrelsome? OK, here are some great words for you. But in contrast to quarrelsome, here's what the Lord's servant does when he engages in disagreement. Are you ready? He must be "kind to everyone." Now, I know I read it quickly, but Peter seems like that qualifies even to use the words "in order." He's explaining everything in order. There's a kind of a tranquility to the way that's written. "Let me just tell you everything that happened." We don't immediately get into some kind of rhetoric like he's in a debate club. We get the story and it's explained to us. Now, we'll get into that in a minute. But let's just start with the fact that it seems to be and I don't know the tone of voice in the conversation, but it seems to be kind, and he's able to teach, "Didasko," this word that he can explain things in an orderly manner. He's going to get to biblical stuff at the end of this but he's speaking here in Acts Chapter 11 in a way that could fall under the umbrella of this kind of logical, sequential, and there was this, then there was this. He was "patiently enduring evil."

Now I got to admit the Greek word that's translated "criticizing" in verse two of Acts 11 is not necessarily a strong, like angry word, but it certainly hits us as we feel attacked any time anyone criticizes us. But the idea is they had a different opinion. They were strongly stating that difference of opinion, and they didn't think that he should go eat with the Gentiles. So I realize that the idea of evil, sometimes it's part of it. There are ad hominem attacks, there are attacks upon me. "You guys" and "you guys believe that." And I mean it can be done in subtle ways, but it feels like you're attacking me and that is evil. But when that happens, let's just say that the circumcised party, the Jewish Christians in the church were doing that. Maybe it was like that, and maybe that word should be a strong word - criticizing him.

And I don't just feel for him because you're a human being and we don't like being criticized. Maybe there's some harshness to this. And if there was, all I'm saying is, hey, even if that was happening, certainly it was happening to Timothy in Ephesus, and Paul knows it happens to all of us as Christians, we need to endure it. That's a good word. Endure the evil. "Be kind, able to teach, patiently enduring evil," verse 25, "correcting his opponents." Now were they opponents? They said, "I don't think you should be going into Cornelius' house." Yeah, I got it. That's an opposing view. I need to correct that opposing view. So I need to learn to correct my opponents. But I've already been told I got to be able to endure evil, I've got to be able to teach, I got to be able to be kind.



And now here's another word that's helpful, "correcting his opponents." With what? "Gentleness." But I do think Peter is seemingly from all I can read in the passage, seems to be pretty gentle about this. "God may perhaps grant them repentance." Now again, they were talking about repentance given to the Romans to become Christians. This is not about that. This is repentance among people in the church who are opposing, in this case, Timothy, about things that were right and true. They were opposing him and he had to be patient and he had to be kind, he had to be someone who could teach and be gentle, but they needed repentance. They needed to change their view. They needed to go in a different direction, "leading to a knowledge of the truth."

Now here's the rule: let's make sure you correct your opponents if they're wrong. We need their minds to align with the truth. We need them to agree with the truth. And the circumcision party ought to agree that Cornelius is embraced into the church. You ought to agree. So I have to correct that, but I need to know that you need to change because there is something going on in your life and this is what Satan wants, right? That "they can come to their senses and escape the snare of..." wrong thinking. Highlight, wrong thinking here. Is that what it says? It involves the wrong thinking, but this is a big word, "The snare of the devil." Psalm 133, "How good and pleasant it is for the brothers to dwell together in unity."

You could look up if you want to sometime, Proverbs Chapter 6. I mean, the whole section 16 through 19. "God hates the one who's dividing the brothers." God says this is a bad thing. The diabolos, the enemy, the adversary wants to do that. And we've got to realize that within the church, when there is division and there are people on the wrong side of the truth, Satan is using that, capturing them to do his will and it's the snare of the devil, and we're praying that they would be released from that. Pray that they would come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil after being captured by him to do his will.

Now, armed with that information, is it a good idea for Timothy to start the conversation with his opponents of, "You are in the snare of Satan?" Probably not. I don't know if that really is gentle or kind or enduring evil. But he needs to know it. And you need to know it if you happen to be right about your position on this and it is something worth talking about and debating. You need to know what's going on, that Satan would love to use this to divide your small group, to divide your ministry, to divide your church. You know it can become a polarizing issue, your view on this or that, or the other thing that is causing division. And all I'm saying is you need to recognize Satan is involved in this. You want that to be solved. You'd like us all to side with the truth. That's important, super important.

But I never want to be quarrelsome. Quarrelsome is not allowed. Quarrelsome is the opposite of kind. Quarrelsome is the opposite of patiently enduring evil. Quarrelsome is the opposite of gentleness. Quarrelsome is the opposite of what we see Peter doing, teaching clearly sequentially, explaining things reasonably and rationally. That passage is great. This needs to be committed to memory, this is a great section of Scripture. If you leave this church and go that was a great sermon today. I don't know, that rarely happens, but maybe that happens to you today. I mean, drive it home with this. Commit this section of Scripture to memory. Never



be quarrelsome, never be quarrelsome, never be quarrelsome. You can't be. It's against the rules. Bible says is wrong.

All right back to our text, what does he do? Well, he teaches, he provides an explanation. Peter began and explained it to them in order, and then he tells the story again. We're very familiar with it if you've been with us in the series. And they're sitting there listening. He listen to them, Peter did, and then they had to listen to him. And there was this explanation. OK? We're not in the generation of explanations, have you noticed that? We're in the generation of one-line daggers. Right? I mean, that's the world we live in, zingers. We're in the world of attacks, you versus me, us versus them. That's the world we live in. And when that becomes part of what we're doing in the church, there is no us/them in the church. It's us in the church. We have become a part of the problem of attacking each other and not engaging or valuing in this kind of rational discussion.

I put it this way. Letter "B." We need to "Value Sincere Explanations." I want an explanation as to why you think that. I want an explanation as to why we can't come to the same view on this thing, assuming it's something we need to come to the same view because God's honor is at stake. I'd like to hear your side of this. And that is a problem, you understand that. I mean, I get people all the time dumping things on my desk and it's all, you know, that's one side of the story. Do you know what I need? I need the other side of the story. I need to hear the others... I need to hear the rest... I need a logical explanation, and what I need to do is to get the party that's got the accusation to also listen to the response of the person who's being accused. I got to have both sides.

James Chapter 1, it would be good for you to write this one down. James Chapter 1 verses 19 and 20. James Chapter 1 verses 19 and 20. "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger." Those are great rules for any counseling session. And when you were sitting there thinking about what do I need in this situation, well, you need to never be quarrelsome. I don't want to be quarrelsome. I know this, I've got to now listen well and I have to be slow to speak. That doesn't mean you speak slowly, but it does mean, because I would never qualify for that, at least, but it means be slow to start. I don't just jump in and immediately, and if you do, it's probably because you're not slow to anger.

And the next verse by the way, verse 22, is "for the anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God," and that I do think is so often what we see as small groups degenerate, as relationships in the church fall apart, as churches split. There is a lot of anger fueling the debate. We can't listen to each other, sincerely provide explanations and listen without anger or frustration. Make sure both sides are heard. I got to quote the famous proverb on this. Matter of fact, let's turn to this, right? This is the last service of the day. You got nothing going on today besides this, right? Proverbs Chapter 18. I'm just kidding, of course, we'll get you out in a minute. A lot less sub-points this week than last week, so you're OK. Last week was a record, I think.



Proverbs 18 verse 17, let's start there, let's get this whole section here. "The one who states his case first seems right." That may be why you've been pulled into the corner with the other person. That may be why you've joined the alliance that believes this thing and against that side of that group in your small group because it seemed right until the other comes and examines him. That's kind of like court language like, "OK, let's get the other side of the story." You got to listen to the other side of the story. And when you do, it's like, OK, well, maybe the first story I heard, maybe this needs to be understood and needs to be properly adjudicated in my thinking.

Verse 18, "The lot puts an end to quarrels." You think about that. In the Old Testament they had a Urim and the Thummin and then the high priests could make a decision if it came to them. The tribe's leaders came. You could have this thing that God did through the supernatural, you know, an indication of what was right and what was wrong. Remember the casting of lots to figure out, you know, who took the stuff from Ai when Achan was... That God used that means in the Old Testament to adjudicate and decide between warring parties.

And that may seem weird to you, the magic 8-ball approach, but that was something God used up until the coming of the Spirit, until we could get the headset on and get something else that's supposed to resolve and adjudicate the mistakes. Even when they were picking a new apostle to replace Judas, they started casting lots. Right? "Well, I think Bill should be. I think Jim should be. I think Mathias should be." And so the lots were cast and you had the parties who were advocating for the people. Well, that settled it. "The lot puts an end to quarrels and decides between powerful contenders."

We're not living in that era anymore. Right? God's got a new way for us. "A brother offended," though, and this is always true, "is more unyielding than a strong city." Picture the look on his face. Picture the crossed arms, right? It's all about how this is approached. Even the word quarrel here is used in our English text the idea of quarreling in verse 18. I mean, it's easy to offend. It's all about the emotions, feelings, the anger. "More unyielding than a strong city." It's hard to win him back. "Quarreling is like the bars of a castle." It's like a fortress now. Just like, you're not going to win me now because I got so much pain involved in this and so much offense.

"From the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach is satisfied; he is satisfied by the yield of his lips." And that, by the way, is why we're slow to speak because the words you use go one way or the other. The carefully chosen words, "A carefully soft answer can turn away wrath." There are so many things your words can do to direct this thing. And Peter was using a logical, sincere, honest, sequential, reasonable, rational explanation of what's going on. And that certainly is carefully weighed words.

And you can either have a stomach satisfied or you can have ulcers depending on how your mouth works, and that's why verse 21 says, "Life and death are in the power of the tongue." You can go one way or the other, "and those who love it will eat its fruit." You may like the conversation and the debate, but you're going to end up living and dying by that sword, the sword of your mouth. And so all I'm saying is be careful, be careful. Don't ever fall into the



category of quarreling and make sure that when you speak, it is a kind of speaking that is done with the kind of respect and gentleness and kindness and patience that Second Timothy 2 says we should have. And be sure that you're someone who is engaging and speaking and listening to a rational, logical, sincere explanations. And that's what Peter was doing, and that is key, and it always should be done in keeping with the truth of what we learn in Second Timothy Chapter 2.

Back to our text. That was a good little proverbial excursion. It says in our text here and in verse 16, "I remember the word of the Lord." I remember the word of the Lord. I remember what Christ said. Of course, the Spirit of God was helping the apostles do that specificity so they could write the New Testament, but he's recalling what would end up being recorded in Matthew Chapter 3 verse 11 about the baptism of the Spirit. That Spirit baptism in their experience they could see in Acts Chapter 2 was a miraculous invasion of the Spirit to show this manifestation physically and audibly, and even in what they did miraculously, and the Gentiles just had the same thing happen.

And so he thought about and remembered the teaching of Christ. And then he said, Well, listen, if that thing that happened to them happened to us and that whole thing was the inclusion doorway, the portal into the body of Christ, well, "Then if God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us and then when we believe, well then who was I to stand in God's way?" Of course I went into their house. I preach the gospel to them. And I doubt there was that much emotion when he said it, maybe there was, but the point is God said this.

OK, number three and you knew I was getting here. We don't cast lots to adjudicate and decide between contenders, but we do, Letter "C" as evangelical Christians believe that God exists and he has spoken. We properly enlist Scripture. That is our job to engage Scripture in a debate, in a disagreement. We want Scripture to be employed. Now notice the first word. What's the first word in Letter "C"? Properly, proper, properly. That's "Properly Engaged Scripture." You might want to put down next to that compare, contrast to Matthew Chapter 4, for instance. Matthew Chapter 4, starting, I don't know, verse 5 or 6, right in there, where Satan starts quoting Scripture. So I didn't say quote Scripture. Because guess what? In almost every debate that ends up at the pastor's desk, right? No matter if it's me or someone else on staff, there's always Scripture being quoted on both sides. Everyone thinks they got God on their side.

And all I'm saying, it's more than quoting a passage. We have to properly enlist Scripture. And that's why sometimes we need help. Right? Jot this one down, First Corinthians Chapter 6 verses 1 through 10. Here's this section about Paul saying you guys are having debates, and he says, isn't there someone in the church who can get you through this? How? To cast lots? No, we need the truth of God's word to help adjudicate and distinguish between contenders. We need the disagreement to be solved because someone in the church should know better. Why are you going before non-Christians? Again, you're acting like men of flesh. You're acting like people who don't have God's honor at stake and you're acting like God has not spoken and you don't have tools. It's like you don't have the headset on. Looks like it's on the dashboard. Put the headset on, and if you can't hear it, clearly, give it to someone else who



can hear really clearly and knows the accent in the voice of the control tower and can start interpreting for you what's being said.

And all I'm telling is the Scripture has to be involved in our debates. And sometimes we're going to find out it goes into a category of Romans Chapter 14 and listen, this is something, keep it to yourself. It doesn't matter. We can all be under the same roof, all in the small group. Just let it be between you and God and let it go. And then other things, no, we got to deal with it. Gentile inclusion had to be dealt with. And he quotes Scripture, and he rightly uses the words of Christ to make the decision that this was the right thing. "I should have been there. I should have been eating with him. It's not just my experience that I had with this sheet coming down. It's the truth of God. God was leading to the conversion of the Gentiles, and this was the right thing."

Scripture needs to be employed, not just quoting it, but rightly understanding it. And maybe you need that to happen. We're in Acts, right? Acts 11. Go to Acts 17 real quick, Acts 17. It doesn't mean that if you do this, it's always going to end well. And I know that you're dying for this, right? "Well, I left my last church, it blew up." OK. I get it. And yes, it happens, but this is the method every time. It doesn't matter how it might have ended in the past. Right? We're trying to employ biblical principles here. We're not going to be quarrelsome. We're going to have sincere explanations. We're going to properly enlist Scripture as best we can, right? Someone in the church should be able to help you through that.

Look at verse 2, "When Paul went in, as was his custom," in Thessalonica, "on three Sabbath days," this is for three weeks, you got a lot of time to process the first two weeks, "he reasoned with them from the Scriptures." So that's what I'm advocating here, properly enlisting Scripture. "Explaining and proving," so he's got logical and reasonable sincere explanations not only of his experience on the road to Damascus, but what the Scriptures say and he's expository those. He's giving all the information that they could possibly need to make it clear "that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer," and die. "and rise from the dead saying, 'this Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ. And some of them,'" not all of them, "some of them were persuaded," and they said, "You're right." Kind of like what we're about to see in verse 15. Yeah, you're right. Our objections were wrong. Let's glorify God together. You're right. That's what the Scripture says. That's what you've explained to us. We're on your side. "Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not just not a few leading women." So a lot of the leading women in the town, "but the Jews were jealous."

Which, by the way, is so often what happens in this. There's jealousy involved, not all the time, but often. "And taking some of the wicked men of the rabble," you've got to love the English Standard Version translators there, right? The rabble, the rabble, The troublemakers might be something that would communicate better. And I'm not trying to criticize the English Standard Version translators. I know some of them, but I'm just saying, rabble? Come on, rabble. The rabble? I haven't used that word in my whole life.



What did the rabble do? There's a sentence. What did the rabble do? "They formed a mob, they set the city in an uproar, they attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out of the crowd." Now this is Paul, Christian evangelist, non-Christians, but do know that the non-Christians in the synagogue were reading the scrolls of Isaiah. They are quoting the Bible against Paul. So their sincerely held beliefs about what they think is biblical. So it's a paradigm that certainly applies to church conflicts.

And all I'm saying is that sometimes people will be persuaded by sincere explanations and properly enlisted Scripture, and sometimes they won't. Sometimes they will get the rabble because they've got some other underlying problem, like jealousy, verse 5, and they will form a mob and there will be uproar in the church and they will attack people like they attack the House of Jason, bringing him out to the crowd. "They could not find them, so they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities," and they shouted, they shouted, "shouting, 'These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason's receive them and they are all acting against decrees of Caesar saying that there is another king, Jesus,'" is messed up.

Now non-Christian/Christians, I get that. But that picture is just, I'm telling you this is not Pollyannish like, "Hey, this is always going work, just reasonably explain and make sure you got proper Scripture and you're interpreting it right and everyone will agree with you." Obviously not. And some of you have that debris in your past of getting through this in some other church or some other small group or whatever. I understand. But this is the pattern, this should be the goal, because what we're praying for is verse 18 Acts 11.

Go back to Acts 11, this is a beautiful way to end this passage. Here it comes. It's so well stated and so idyllic and I wish it were true every time and I want it to be true in your life in the next conflict when you hit turbulence, I'd love for you to be able to navigate it like this where it ends after non-quarrelsome, sincere explanations and properly enlisted Scriptures. When they hear it, they'll stop criticizing you. They'll stop being your opponent. They will glorify God and say, "Well, then you're right. You've explained it well." Scripture wins the day and we're good because that's how it ends here. "Yeah, you're right. I don't much like the Roman soldiers. I don't much like the fact that they're claiming that Jesus is, you know, their savior. Like, he's our savior. I got struggles. I don't like that some of the traditions of the fathers aren't being kept. We're supposed now eat with them. But you're right. "God has granted also repentance to the Gentiles that leads to life."

One last passage as time gets away from us. James Chapter 3. Here's what I'm praying for as you respond to that kind of Christ-honoring reason. Matter of fact, just jot that down. We'll have two minutes to deal with this point, but "Respond to Christ-Honoring Reason" is the third point. Number three, respond to Christ-honoring reason. You've heard the old line, "listen to reason." I want you to listen to Christ-honoring reason because there's that third element involved. It's not your opinion, not my opinion, it's God and God's Word and God's honor. And so we want to listen to God-honoring reason and be persuaded by it.



And this is what wise people look like. And I want my church, this church, your church, our church to be filled with wise people who can solve their relational conflicts. All the feuding, all the disputes, all the disagreements. I don't think they handled it right. I don't think that's the right thing. I don't think those people should be doing that. Why are they involved in that? And I don't think they should do that thing or this thing or believe in that. OK, I want our church to be filled with wise people who can deal with the problems the way that verse 13 through verse 18 describes. This is beautiful. Let's read it.

James 3:13, "Who is wise and understanding among you." I mean, who is the one who God says, "There's good sense, there's glory." Who's wise and understanding? "Well, by his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom." But you're not bombastic, pugnacious people. They're not argumentative people. They're not quarrelsome people. "But if you have," look at it again, here it comes, by the way, that's a whole nother state, "bitter jealousy," so often a part of unresolved conflicts in the church, jealousy, by the way, "and selfish ambition," and that goes hand in hand so often. If you got that "in your hearts," don't let that come out of your mouth, be quick to speak about the things that you think or that because being fueled by jealousy, "don't boast and be false to the truth." Blinding, by the way, is jealousy and selfish ambition. I mean, you'll engage in disagreements and you'll be wrong. Right?

So that's not wisdom that comes down from above, even though you might be quoting Scripture. "This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, it is earthly and unspiritual," and there it is again, Second Timothy 2, "it's demonic." Satan loves to divide Christians. He is not for unity in the church. He's all about the bad and the bad is let's not have that in church. Not only is it not pleasant, it is not good. It's demonic. It's our enemy. "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist." These core problems are under the surface of our hearts. Guess what's going to come if you let that rule? "Disorder and every vile practice."

But note another good verse to memorize, "But the wisdom from above," God's word, the right way to handle this, "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, it's impartial and sincere." That's worth reading again. "Pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere." You say, "I mean, that's not what we've been talking about." That's the goal. And by the way, I'd like you to be in this category, "And a harvest of righteousness." I mean, the reverberating effects of the bad should be feared, and the reverberating effects of the good of a unified church should also be sought after. "A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

If you left church after a long, lingering time at the donut table, and you happen to pass by a busy intersection and you see your pastor in his car in the middle of the intersection stalled out. You see my Compass Bible Church sticker, you come up behind me and you come up to my window, my car is off, and you knock on my window and I'm praying in the front seat. And then I looked up and it's you and I roll my window down and I said, "I was just praying, just praying for someone who can help me out. You are an answer to my prayer. Would you do something for me to be the answer to my prayer?" And if I said, "Could you just get in my car? And could you just steer it while I get behind it? I'm going to push this out of traffic. Thanks for



parking your car behind me, turning on your flashes and I'm going to steer this out and I'm going to get this out of traffic and get to safety. And we're going to solve this problem with my car and I'll call AAA and do all that."

If I said, "I've been praying for someone to come along who can steer this to safety." I'm just wondering, I don't know, let's just say, it's 1:15 in the afternoon. Big intersection, your pastor who just spent the morning preaching to you, preparing a sermon, doing all that I've tried to do for you this morning. I don't know. Would you get in my car and steer it while I pushed it? I got three or four of you, maybe, who have responded. (audience laughs) Right? I wouldn't expect an audible response, but I'm hoping, I don't know, 51% of you might say, "Yeah, I can do that. I'll do that for you. I mean, if I'm an answer to your prayer and all, sure."

I do pray that our church is unified, filled with people who are peacemakers. But it isn't my prayer only. Matter of fact, Christ prayed a very specific prayer in John 17. And he prayed something that you have the wherewithal to be the answer to. And by the way, that passage is so good because it's not just the people who he's speaking of in the near field. It's not just the apostles who have been following him around Jerusalem and Galilee and Judea. Jesus says, "I'm praying for those who will believe in my name because of them." Well, what was he praying? Let me read it to you. John 17:21, "That they may all be one," there's a statement of unity, "just as you, Father," Jesus is praying this, "are in me, and I in you, that they also might be in us." Now, that's a mouthful. But listen to that. "I prayed that they might be one, just as you Father are in me and I am in you," talk about unity, "that they also might be in us," purpose clause, "so that the world may believe that you sent me."

A verse later he says, here's what I'm praying for, "I in them," this group of people who are mine, not just that first-generation but down to the 21st, "and you," Father, "in me, that they might become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." Another mouthful, right? "So that the world may know that you sent me and loved them," right? Looking down the corridor of time. "Even as you've loved me."

You're going to have conflict, maybe this afternoon, maybe next week, maybe next month. Potential schism in your small group. I'm just asking you, please, please value the unity of the church. Peace at any price? I'm not telling you that. Most things dropped? Yeah, probably most things should be dropped. Some things to be discussed, discuss it without being quarrelsome, be reasonable, logical, sincere explanations, biblically driven. Things adjudicated between strong contenders because of Scripture, properly interpreted, and then listening to reason, being open to reason. You can do that. God has given you that ability. The instructions are there and you and I can be an answer to the high priestly prayer of Christ in John 17. That's huge. May we please him in being the answer to his prayer this week.

Pray with me. God, we need desperately to be a church that shows the world that we're Christ's, that we are your sons, that you have loved us, that your love is upon us. You said if we love one another the whole world would know that we're your disciples. And then you went further in this prayer, Christ, and you told us that that is going to be expressed in the fact that we can be unified. That we're not like just the Elks Lodge or the, you know, the Rotary Club.



We're not just looking at personal interpersonal conflicts and hurt feelings. We got the honor of Christ that we're concerned about. We're willing to overlook personal offense. We're concerned about the truth and we want to make peace and we want to logically hear each other. We want a biblically defer to Scripture, even when it's hard for us. Like it was hard for those Jews in the first century to say, "OK, I guess that Roman centurion is a brother in Christ." That's hard. So God help us work through these issues and all the practical ways we have to do it.

In Jesus name. Amen.