

Letting God Have the Last Word

Acts 11:1-18

A business article that I read some time back cited an experiment that was conducted by professors Gary Hamel and C. K. Prahalad. It may be an urban legend for all I know because I wasn't able to verify the story, though I noticed that John Maxwell also cited it as an actual experiment. Anyway, whether simply parable or fact, it was a great story. Hamel and Prahalad claim that four monkeys were placed in a room with a climbing pole. At the top of the pole are some nice juicy bananas. However, when any monkey climbs high enough to reach for the bananas, the entire room is heavily sprayed down with ice-cold water, leaving some rather unhappy and shrieking monkeys. This same procedure happens every time any monkey goes for the bananas. Being pretty smart monkeys, they catch on quickly and start pummeling any monkey that even tries to climb the pole because they don't want to get drenched again. So eventually, none of the monkeys goes for the bananas. But what is interesting is that whenever the researchers put a new monkey into the cage, the water-conditioned monkeys prevent the new one from climbing the pole, giving him a pummeling any time he tries. The new monkey figures out that climbing the pole gets him into trouble. Even after all the original water-conditioned monkeys are replaced with new ones who have never been drenched with water, they still have the same result. There are enforcers of the no-climbing rule even though none of the monkeys knows about the original reason. When new monkeys come into the room, they are all excited about the bananas at the top of the pole, but the other monkeys succeed in taking all the joy and excitement out of the new recruit.

And that is something that any traditional church can struggle with. It is easy to put a wet blanket on the enthusiasm and idealism of a new Christian. And many churches are experts at doing so. As soon as people aspire to try something they are doused with cold water. When I first became Reformed, I attended a Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. And I loved the Lord, and really wanted to serve him. I started going door to door, handing out tracts and inviting people to church. The elders met with me and confronted me as if I had caused them great shame. They told me only pastors are allowed to evangelize. And I said, "Well, I was just trying to invite people to church and give them a Gospel tract." Well, they were suspicious of tracts and they only wanted the pastor to do visitation. Of course, the pastor wasn't doing it. And there were other ways in which the wind was taken out of my sails. But over time, like those monkeys, I learned

where I would get affirmation and where I would get doused with an ice cold shower. And I learned that I was valued and respected when I was a passive, quiet pew filler. Well, that worked for a couple of years. But you know me. I have a hard time being passive, so I eventually joined the PCA.

But I found that *I myself* could do the same things as those water-conditioned monkeys. I could take the wind out of other people's sails. I had learned legalism well. I would shoot my Scripture pistol first, and ask questions later. Like these people who misunderstood Peter, I misunderstood people and sometimes hurt them. I would too quickly jump to conclusions like the people did with Peter.

And I thank God that my PCA pastor was so patient and firm and persevering with me. And over time I began to reach for the Biblical bananas and not be dissuaded by the pummelings I would get in some circles. I learned that I must let God have the last word, not man (at successfully practiced it at least some of the time). And that was hard for me, because I was such a people pleaser. I didn't want anyone to think poorly of me (which is really a symptom of pride, isn't it?). But what ended up happening during those years is that the people who poured the most cold water on me were the only ones that I pleased. Isn't that a strange thing?

As we go through this passage we will see that Peter succeeds in letting God have the last word. But some of the same people who douse water on Peter here will douse water on Peter in chapter 15 and chapter 21. In fact, Galatians 2 says that Peter received enough dousings that at one point he played the hypocrite out of fear of man. And I want to begin by looking at how a giant like Peter could succumb to this monkey syndrome. Look at Galatians 2:11-14.

Galatians 2:11 ¶ Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed;

Galatians 2:12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

Galatians 2:13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

Galatians 2:14 ¶ But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before *them* all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"

You can see how the fear of man influenced Peter in this situation. Now you may not think that you have the fear of man, but all of us have to struggle with it from time to time.

And I think that Acts 11 has a great message on how to let God have the last word. Obviously, there are many other truths that I could bring from this passage. But I really think the Lord wants me to stick to this sub-theme.

I. Conflict Raised (vv. 1-3) – Chapter 10’s high spirits dashed

Let’s begin at verses 1-3 where the conflict is raised. Acts 11:1. Keep in mind that in chapter 10 Peter has experienced the supernatural provision of the Lord and the glorious inclusion of the Gentiles into the church. He is enthused. He’s excited. He’s come from a spiritual high and wants to share it with others. But rather than receiving affirmation and encouragement, he gets a cold shower. **Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!”** And Peter is probably thinking, “Come on guys! With all the neat things that have happened, and that’s all you can say?” Now he wisely kept his mouth under control, but I’m sure he must have thought of a few choice words. Talk about church not being fun anymore. Have you ever had that happen to you? Where the elders have taken all the fun out of your life? Hey, I’m a fallen sinner, and I am sure that I have done it at some point or another. The Bible is realistic, and it points out that if the other apostles could give unwarranted cold showers in the first century, you might occasionally get them in our own century. We need to fight against this negativism within ourselves and we need to make sure that we are not overcome when we are on the receiving end of it. We need to take with a grain of salt what other people think of us *if we are convinced that the Lord is pleased with what we have said or done*. We need to learn to let Him have the last word.

A. There will always be people listening for you to slip (v. 1)

These verses give us some perspective. The first thing that we see is that there will always be people listening for you to slip or to blow it. These people have a special knack (they might think of it as a gift – but it certainly isn’t from the Holy Spirit) of discovering and pointing out all of your flaws. And of course they mean it for your welfare, right? And when you are in those kinds of churches, you are always watching your backside wondering whom you are going to get shot by next. Who else is “watching out for my welfare? I want to avoid them!” Right?

1. Sadly, the apostles and brethren (v. 1a), while not the ones to spray with a cold shower, were still part of the problem.

I want you to notice three groups of people that are mentioned in these verses. The first group in verse 1 is the apostles. The second group is the brethren. The third group is in verse 2, and it is described as “those of the circumcision.” That is not a reference here to Jews, because Peter was a Jew as well. It was a party of people within the church who were zealous for circumcision and the retaining of all the ceremonial laws. In the passage that I read from Galatians 2:12, it says that Peter, Barnabas and many Jews feared “those who were of the circumcision.” It was a group from the Pharisees who retained some of their Pharisaical ideas. And while this party was silenced in verse 17, they just bided their time, and brought up trouble again in the later chapters of Acts and on into the epistles.

But here’s the sad thing, even though the apostles weren’t technically the ones bombarding Peter with this accusation, they weren’t defending Peter either. *They* didn’t douse Peter with cold water, but they were no doubt pulling on the monkey’s leg and saying, “Come on Peter. Let’s make sure that we don’t rock the boat. Let’s not upset these people.” Leaders are meant to take courageous stands in situations like these, but it is so easy to crumble. And you need to pray that we would be like Peter was here, and not like the example of the other passive apostles.

2. Sadly, the news travels faster than Peter can (v. 1b)

Another thing that I see in this verse is the sad reality that the news traveled faster than Peter could. The news gets to the church in Jerusalem in verse 1, and Peter arrives in verse 2. Have you ever walked into a meeting with the sinking realization that there was probably a meeting before this meeting, and the agenda’s already been set, and you’re probably the guy that’s in trouble. This can happen in families, in businesses. It certainly happens in politics. But I have discovered that caucusing happens all the time in churches – especially churches that have been around for 100 years. Caucusing is where groups will meet and discuss strategies for overturning church policies or getting rid of a committee member, or influencing a certain person. Assignments have already gone out as to who should talk to who. And after everything is said and decided by the power brokers behind the scenes, then they will call the official public meeting. I’ve been to General Assembly meetings where it seems like your being there is just a formality, and anything that is said by us committee members that doesn’t fit, has an instantaneous answer with a well written paper pulled out. You

may not be able to change this sad reality, but you can certainly avoid being part of it. When conservatives in our denomination began responding with their own secret caucuses, and assigning each of us when to stand at a given mike and what to say, I told them that I wanted no part of it, and that we needed to be an open sunshine denomination where everything was discussed in the open and decided in the open, with a trust in God's Word and His providence and timing. But don't be surprised when news travels so fast that you are blindsided by it. If it hasn't happened to you at work or church or some other place, it eventually will. And you need to be on guard for your reactions.

3. Sadly, the news that they are interested in talking about is the negative, not the positive (v. 1c) They are zealous for the purity of the church

A third sad reality that I see in verse 1 is that the news some people are most interested in is not the power, grace and victory of God. It's not the positive things that are happening, but the negative things. Isn't that what makes newspapers sell? A newspaper wouldn't be very profitable if it weren't for the bad news. It is just human nature. And so a young Christian family will become excited to grow and to overcome their sins. But they get picked on so much about a whole host of things that they do that they feel shoved out of the church. I am very thankful that this church has been kind and gracious to newcomers who have different hairstyles, wear nose and eyebrow rings or do things that may or may not need to be changed eventually, but that are just different. I think you have made people for the most part feel comfortable and loved. But we do need to guard against judgmentalism. God is not finished with any of us yet, and love covers a multitude of sins. There are times that love confronts sins, but love often covers sin while people are growing. And we need to be more ready to rejoice in the daily growth in the Lord that is happening in young believers lives than to focus always on the things that the Spirit has not yet helped them to conquer.

So from verse 1 I learn that we need to take action against hurtful judgmentalism and not be passive. We must not be part of the gossip chain. And we must become more interested in the good that is happening in our neighbor's life than the bad.

B. There will always be people who are quick to contend (v. 2)

Verse 2 shows a second thing that is common to fallen humanity. There will always be people who are quick to contend. It's sad, but true. In

this case, it was the circumcision party. **And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him.** Peter comes home to rejoice, but he quickly becomes roast preacher. Someone once said, “Christians are like porcupines in a snowstorm. We need each other to keep warm but we hurt each other if we get too close.” *But I don’t think that should be a truism for Christians.* And when we see Christians who are poking others too much, we ought to come alongside to be peacemakers, or at least to make sure that people are being heard. But you know what frequently happens? The porcupines are the tiny minority, but the large majority doesn’t want to get attacked themselves, so they just go along. They don’t say anything. There was a picketer in San Francisco who was highlighted in the San Francisco Chronicle because for years this guy would show up at every protest, even protests that contradicted ones he represented earlier. His sign that he carried said, “Shame!” When interviewed he said, “I figure it covers anything, and it gives me a feeling of belonging.” It’s sad when people feel like they have to take sides in order to belong. It’s the only way they know how to relate. They take sides with one porcupine on this day, and when they are with a porcupine who holds to totally different views, they take sides with him too. According to 1 Corinthians 7, our goal should never be to take sides between two Christians, but always to be for both parties, and take sides with God. Try to let God have the last word.

C. There will always be people who will look at the glass half empty (v. 3)

Verse 3 shows one last dimension to the trouble in the church, and that is that there will always be people who will look at the glass half empty instead of seeing the glass as being half full. In other words, they will be pessimists who look on the negative side of things. Instead of seeing the incredible success of chapter 10, they see a defeat. Instead of seeing Gentiles converted, they see Peter as fraternizing with the enemy. Instead of seeing the freedom that God had ushered the church into, they saw Peter as robbing them of their ceremonial laws. And I have known people who just can’t see the positive side of anything. If they start feeling ill, they assume the worst and wonder if they have cancer. You know those kind of people, don’t you? And they can sometimes be frustrating, especially if you are taking the brunt of their criticisms. You feel like you are constantly having to calm down concerns and to put out fires. Well, let’s see how Peter responds.

II. Conflict Answered (vv. 4-18) – A soft answer turns away wrath

A. *For once, Peter thinks before he talks (“in order” v. 4)*

For once Peter thinks before he talks. Verse 4 says, **But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning...** That phrase “in order” shows that he wasn’t talking emotionally, like he sometimes did. He was measuring his words. He was being careful with what he said. In the Gospel accounts, Peter was constantly sticking his foot in his mouth. He was reacting. He was the emotional one that would come out with a zinger statement before he hardly even thought about it. And if you are one of those types, take heart. If Peter could learn, you can too.

1. He explains rather than simply defending Himself (v. 4)

And I am amazed at how in this tense situation Peter uses a soft answer to turn away wrath. He has learned a great deal of self-control. And it’s hard not to get emotional when you are being beat up. I can understand that. But it’s good to take a step back and to try to objectively look at the problem from various angles and to try to understand the concerns of your detractors. So Peter explains God’s purpose rather than defending himself. There is a difference. In the first one you lay out the facts for what they are. In the second, you try to cover yourself; to protect yourself; you try to only present the evidence that makes you look good. So Peter explains the whole situation, rather than simply defending himself, and he deals with the problem rather than attacking people.

2. Notice that Peter justifies his actions by appealing to God, as we must (vv. 4-17)

The second thing that we will notice throughout the speech is that Peter justifies his actions by appealing to God. We need to get used to using the Bible. Nothing but the Bible is infallible. When you give your opinion and don’t back it up with God’s Word, it remains your opinion. And what makes your opinion any better than someone else’s opinion? We need to not just give our opinions, but to back up what we say from the Bible.

3. Notice that Peter shows great humility and patience (vv. 4-17) as we must.

Notice third that Peter shows great humility and patience. Given the attack that he had received, it would have been very easy to get testy and defensive. But he does not do so. He gently, patiently and humbly presents God’s Word, and trusts God to change people’s hearts.

4. Notice that Peter is not adversarial.

Sometimes arguments are fanned into fights because we respond to heat with more heat. But the Bible says a soft answer turns away wrath (Prov. 15:1). Another Proverb that I love is Proverbs 25:28, which says, **Whoever *has* no rule over his own spirit is *like* a city broken down, without walls.** We think that lashing out is the most effective way to defend ourselves, but we actually leave ourselves defenseless to Satanic attack and showing our human adversaries that we really don't have a leg to stand on. We don't have any walls. A sign that you have a weak argument is that you resort to mockery, insult or anger. If you know you are right, it will eventually come out. And so he was not adversarial.

5. Notice that Peter does not act like a pope.

One last point before we dig into his defense is that Peter does not act like a pope. The Roman Catholic Church claims that Peter was the first pope. But we saw in Galatians 2 that Peter was willing to be accountable to Paul's rebuke. In this passage we see that he is willing to answer as a person who is totally accountable to God like they all are.

B. Peter lays out his Biblical case (vv. 5-17)

1. His prayer (v. 5a)

So let's quickly look at his Biblical case. Because Peter is repeating the story that we already went through in chapter 10, I will just give some highlights. In verse 5 he says, **I was in the city of Joppa praying...** This was not something Peter entered into autonomously. He was seeking God's guidance. Now by itself it's not enough to say, "Hey, I prayed about it." If you've prayed about it, let's hear the evidence that God gave to you. But certainly prayer is a critical place to begin.

2. His vision (vv. 5-10)

Then in verses 5-10 he tells about the apostolic vision. Peter was acting under God's direction.

3. His argument with God (v. 8) (He identifies with His detractors)

In verse 8 Peter let's the people know that he can understand their concerns, because he had the same concerns. In fact, he didn't just argue with a man. He argued with God. Wow! That's pretty humbling to admit. **But I said, "Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any**

time entered my mouth. Peter was just as steadfast of an observer of the ceremonial law as any of them were. So in effect, Peter is identifying with his detractors. He is saying, “I understand where you are coming from. That’s exactly what I was thinking!” And by doing this he helps to pull them into the story and identify with each stage of his own preparation. When others have a hard time believing what we believe, it’s a good idea to remember that we didn’t always come to these ideas overnight. We had our own struggles. Don’t be hard on people with different theological persuasions. Think through the struggles that you had when you were becoming Reformed, and they are probably exactly the same struggles that your detractors are having. Try to identify with what they are thinking, and address those concerns. Be sympathetic to what they are facing. This can help to calm the waters. It’s a good strategy when dealing with conflict.

4. God’s rebuke (v. 9)

Fourth, he mentions God’s rebuke to himself. **But the voice answered me again from heaven. “What God has cleansed you must not call common.** Now what is so great about bringing this up is that it puts Peter in the same boat as they are in needing the rebuke. That comes off so much better than just correcting others and giving the impression that we are above correction ourselves. This is not always possible because we don’t want to have a false humility that admits to things we aren’t guilty of. But if we can let people know that we too are sinners who have needed the correction of God’s Word, it lets them know that we are not coming down on them as self-righteous Pharisees. But while it is subtle, there is no question about the fact that these detractors need the same rebuke that Peter needed. So this was a polite way of saying, “You guys need God’s rebuke too.” Sometimes the subtle use of a surgical knife with a painkiller is more effective than slicing with a sword and no painkiller.

5. God’s threefold testimony (v. 10)

Verse 10 mentions the three times that God gives the vision and says the same thing. In Jewish thought, this was a solemn thing. The Bible often required a threefold testimony, and when God Himself testified three times, it was seen as being very important. And the fact that the sheet came from heaven and was withdrawn back up into heaven shows that this all came from God.

6. Divine providence (v. 11)

In verse 11 he appeals to divine providence. God's timing was amazing. The moment the vision finishes, the three men stood at the house in answer to the vision. So there is an appeal to divine providence.

7. The Spirit's guidance (v. 12)

In verse 12 he appeals to the Spirit's guidance. **Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing.** Implying that he had doubts just like they did, but that God told him to no longer doubt. So again, he is identifying with them, but also making it clear that he had no choice. God was in this all the way. Which implies what? It implies that they too have no choice. But you can see the careful way that he phrases it. A big part of leadership is learning how to control your mouth.

8. Six witnesses (v. 12)

Then in the second half of verse 12 he appeals to six witnesses. And boy was he glad that he took those witnesses along. In Jewish life, three witnesses were enough, and more than enough. Well, here is a doubling of that full witness. And they were standing with Peter right now to back up everything that he said.

9. Angelic confirmation (v. 13)

Verse 13 mentions the angelic confirmation.

10. Salvation of the Gentiles (v. 14)

Verse 14 gives the angelic promise that these Gentiles would be saved. And so we're not talking about just anyone being brought into the church. These were saved people. And the angel himself said they were saved.

11. Baptism in the Spirit identical to Acts 2 (v. 15)

Then in verse 15 Peter points out that they received exactly the same manifestation of the baptism of the Spirit that the Jews in Acts 2 did. **And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.** So it is becoming clear that the ancient prophecies about the kingdom being extended to all nations is now beginning to be fulfilled.

12. The testimony of Jesus (v. 16)

Peter appeals to the testimony of Jesus in verse 16. **Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, "John indeed baptized**

with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. This statement accomplished a number of things. First, it's just another indication that Peter was just as surprised as they were. This was no conspiracy to do an end run around the apostles. Things were beginning to come together for him only as he entered into the situation. So he is not surprised at all by their reaction. Secondly, just as their own baptism initiated them into kingdom power, this was a baptism of the Gentiles into kingdom living. Initiations are always harder to accept because they involve change. Third, it made it clear that these Gentiles were not second-class citizens. Fourth, it made it clear that God did not require circumcision for them to be full church members. This of course would continue to be a sore point for some people in the church for some time to come. But Peter makes it very clear that God has the right to do this, and had indeed done so.

13. Peter in effect says, “I don’t dare resist God. How about you?” (v. 17) –

Finally, in verse 17 he sums everything up. **If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?”** And the implication is quite clear, though politely stated: “Who are you that you can resist God?” We must always let God have the last word in all that we say and do. And that’s where we are going to end. We are going to spend a few minutes opening up what it means to let God have the last Word.

III. Letting God have the Last Word (vv. 17-18) – gracious submission to God’s Word.

A. *Peter set an example by letting God have the last word in a difficult situation (v. 17)*

Some people let God have the last word when they are forced into it or when they are shamed into it, while others are eager to know God’s will. But Peter, as a leader, shows the importance of following God no matter how difficult obedience might be. He knew he was going to get flak. He knew it. Peter knew that he would even lose some influence in the church. A number of commentators point out that from this place on, it isn’t Peter, but James who is the acknowledged leader in the church in Jerusalem. Previously it was Peter, James and John. After this it is James and Peter and John (Gal. 2:9). In Acts 21 Paul goes to James and all the church in Jerusalem. Now I don’t think that James shoved Peter out. Peter is still respected and has a strong leadership role, but while the majority of the

church respects Peter, only James has the respect of the whole church. The circumcision party that plagued the church throughout the book of Acts was only interested in submitting to James. And the passage I started from in Galatians 2 shows that there is sometimes a cost to taking unpopular stands. Let me read that again so that you can get a little bit of a feel for the tensions that were going on behind the scenes.

It's Galatians 2:11-14.

Galatians 2:11 ¶ **Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed;** [I feel sorry for Peter because he's got pressures from Jerusalem; he's got pressures from Paul. It seems like he can't win for losing. He's trying to be all things to all people, but it's not working. He eventually figures out that you can't please everyone in the church. He's just got to focus on pleasing the Lord and letting the Lord have the last word. Anyway, Paul says that Peter was to be blamed...]

Galatians 2:12 **for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.** [I want you to notice that these men came from James, and Peter feared these men who came from James. He feared getting pummeled. It was the monkey syndrome. None of us likes getting pummeled, but if we don't develop a greater awe and reverence and fear for the Lord than we have for man, we will always lack perspective in the midst of those pummelings. So it seems as if James was not at this point opposing those from the circumcision party. In fact, *he sends them*. James seems to get along with them. I think there is a little bit of leadership tension that Peter feels here. And it changes Peter's reactions to the Gentile believers whom he loved. Let me read that again: "**for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.**"]

Galatians 2:13 **And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.** [What we see here is that when a leader does not let God have the last word, it's easy for others to imitate him. He will have a negative influence and drag them down. This is why Titus and Timothy and Acts insist on high standards when choosing leaders. It's hard enough for *strong* leaders to take a stand in unpopular situations, but when leaders don't have leadership qualifications, it is even harder. Paul says,]

Galatians 2:14 ¶ **But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before *them all*, "If you,**

being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?

He is saying, “Be consistent.” Don’t let the squeaky wheels have the last word. Don’t let those who are always dousing things with cold water have the last Word. Let God have the last Word. Be willing to take the flak. Develop such a fear of God that you are not driven by the fear of man. Now we will see in Acts 15 that James eventually takes a tough, strong stand against the “circumcision party,” but it took him a while to recognize the terrible dynamics that were playing out as a result of his just being a nice guy and going with the flow. In fact, in Acts 11:1, all of the apostles were being nice guys and letting Peter handle it. It’s almost as if they are thinking: “After all, he’s a tough guy, right? He can handle it. I sure don’t want to get torched. We’ll see how this plays out. We’ll let Peter sort his out.” But the apostles should have stood up for Peter. It’s a tough thing to be a leader in a situation like this. And it helps me to understand why good people cave in at General Assembly and say nothing, and why people keep their mouths shut on issues that are near and dear to their hearts at Presbytery. They want to be liked, rather than letting God have the last word.

If the Spirit is convicting you of anything through this sermon, don’t let Satan beat up on you. Respond to his accusations like Peter did in Galatians by repenting and getting back on your feet and doing it right the next time. We will get it right some times and we will fall other times. It’s just a fact of life. But the difference between the elect and those going to perdition is outlined in Proverbs 24:16

Proverbs 24:16 For a righteous *man* may fall seven times

And rise again,

But the wicked shall fall by calamity.

What he is saying there is that the righteous man falls into sin over and over (it’s a fact of life), but he always gets up and tries again, whereas the wicked stay down. They give up trying. Don’t give up. Your goal should be perfection, but your day-to-day life needs to take into account that you will never reach perfection. You will fall seven times (which is a symbolic number indicating that falling won’t stop - you will fall over and over). But as a child of God, you will get up and keep moving toward the goal. Sometimes Satan will act like those monkeys and make you want to give up reaching for the bananas. He will try to pull on your legs and pummel you and convince you that you aren’t up to it. But take your cue from God, not from Satan. Let God have the last word.

***B. The authority of God's word silenced the opposition (v. 18a).
We must not argue when we do not have a Biblical case.***

Verse 18 begins: **When they heard these things they became silent...** I am a little cynical about *why* they were silent here, because they bring up the same issues in chapter 15 and 21. But at least they quit arguing here. They are smart enough to know that in a church where the Word of God is king, it doesn't do any good to continue arguing after a persuasive speech like Peter gave. So they are silent and wait for a better time. But, whether I have the right to be cynical about their motives or not, I think we can learn from their silence. We must not keep arguing when we do not have a Biblical case. I know people who just won't quit arguing even after they have clearly lost the argument. According to Proverbs, that is the characteristic of a fool. A fool wants to win an argument even if the facts are against him. A fool wants to win an argument rather than winning people. But Proverbs says that even a fool is considered wise if he puts his hand upon his mouth and keeps quiet. The other lesson I learn from that phrase is that we must restrict ourselves to using the authority of God's Word to silence opposition, not simply flex our muscle. Peter had power that he could have flexed. But he kept bringing people back to the Word of God. It is the Word of God alone that should triumph in a church. Let God have the last word.

C. Praise to God is the godly response to a lost argument (v. 18b)

Here's another response in verse 18. **And they glorified God...** If that were our goal in every argument that we had, our arguments would be most productive. But often our arguments are simply to glorify our pride and make us feel important or respected. But if your goal truly is to glorify God, you will be able to instantly say, "Wow! I hadn't realized that. Thank you for bringing up that point. You are right and I am wrong." But if your goal is to glorify your pride, you won't be able to say that. If we are seeking truth and God's good pleasure it will become easy to admit defeat and gladly change our position. Romans says, **Let God be true and every man a liar.** Actually, I have seen some of you guys do that in arguments, and it blesses me. You have been corrected and you say, "You are right." And you just move on with the conversation as if it was the most natural thing in the world to be corrected. That's the way it should be. Psalm 141:5 says,

**Let the righteous strike me;
It shall be a kindness.
And let him rebuke me;
It shall be as excellent oil;**

Let my head not refuse it.

Wow! Where would the church be if we all had that attitude? Let's make it our goal in our arguments to glorify God, not to win an argument.

D. Admitting that we are wrong is the second godly response to a lost argument (v. 18c)

And that's what at least some in the church did in the last phrase of verse 18. They glorified God, saying, "**Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.**" They were saying, "You are right and we were wrong. In fact, we are glad we were wrong because it is evident to us now that God is expanding His kingdom way beyond what we would have dreamed was possible!"

E. Though the contenders are silenced here, they continue to give trouble in chapters 15 and 21. Nothing is new under the sun.

Brothers and sisters, let me urge you to let these words sink into your souls and to become a pattern for your life. You can't have as your goal ease and comfort, because God has guaranteed there will always be monkeys who pull at your legs, scream at you and or pummel you from time to time. Satan will ensure that it will happen. And during those times you will be able to withstand if you make it your goal to let God have the last word.

Don't make it your goal to be understood by others, because there will always be people who won't be convinced even by the Word of God. How could you get a clearer Word from the Lord than what Peter gave? What an incredible argument!! Yet, the obstinate hearts of the circumcision party continued the monkey syndrome all the way through this book. Their attitude was, "Don't confuse me with the facts. I might be silent in this chapter, but until our position is adopted, we won't give up." They used subterfuge and every dirty trick to get their way, and eventually some of them left the church in frustration.

Don't look for a perfect church. There will always be insecure or overly secure pastors, elders and deacons and members and brothers and sisters. There will always be righteous men and women who fall seven times. Instead of being surprised and shocked and judgmental, help them get up the eighth and the ninth time and encourage them in their walk.

Don't get discouraged when people treat *you* as the problem when they are utterly blind to their own major contributions to the problem. Instead, let us be forbearing of one another's faults while we all move

towards the goal of holiness. But at the same time, don't neglect issues that need to be addressed. Peter was gracious here, but he addressed the problem head on.

Don't be discouraged when people call you proud and do not smell the pride that is wafting from their own pours and mouth. You see, pride is like bad breath or garlic body odor. Everyone knows that you have it except for you. That's the way it is with these people. So be willing to be reminded of your own pride by proud people who can't recognize their own pride. That's hard to swallow, but you can trust God to bring the pride of others to their attention through the Scriptures that we lovingly present. But in all things, let's commit ourselves to letting God have the last word. Amen.

Brothers and sisters, I charge you to let God have the last word in your conflicts.