

## Push Back or Push Forward

(Acts 10:44-11:18)

### Introduction

1. Theme: Jesus accelerates us by the Holy Spirit to grow deeper through His family, wider in our impact for the gospel.
2. Issue: We are to welcome/love everyone, but when should we accept/trust someone as a brother or sister in Christ?

### The Holy Spirit comes with an identifiable experience [Acts 10:44-48]

1. [44-46] Roman Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit
  - a. [44] As Peter teaches them the good news about faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit “falls upon all” of them.
    - i. Holy Spirit: Third person of the Trinity (one God, expressed in 3 Persons).
    - ii. Throughout Acts: He’s given to people (5:32; 8:18; 11:17; 15:8) as a gift (2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17).
    - iii. Discernible experience of the living God: Described as falling on people (8:16; 10:44; 11:15), coming upon (1:8; 19:6); poured out on (2:17-18; 10:45); received (2:38; 8:15, 17; 10:47); being baptized in (1:5; 11:16); being filled with (2:4; 9:17).
  - b. [45] The accompanying Jewish believers are shocked
    - i. Why? Their distinguishing identity is that they are circumcised.
      1. Circumcision: External symbol required in the old Jewish covenant-relationship with God.
      2. Though heard the visions, saw manifestation of Spirit, can’t believe Gentiles fully accepted.
    - ii. They still see a relationship with God requiring people to follow the old traditions/customs.
      1. This excludes uncircumcised “outsiders.”
2. [46] The Holy Spirit manifests in the Gentile believers
  - a. Spirit’s coming expressed supernaturally in tongues (unknown languages, human or angelic) & praising God.
  - b. In Acts, 6 instances of ways people experience effects of the coming of the Spirit:
    - i. Pentecost [1:8; 2:4,11]: Speaking in tongues, praise God’s mighty works, power to witness.
    - ii. Samaria [8:18]: Supernatural experience amazes Simon Magus, who attempts to buy power.
    - iii. Caesarea [10:46]: Speaking in tongues, praising God.
    - iv. Ephesus [19:6]: Paul finds John the baptizer’s disciples speaking in tongues & prophesying.
    - v. Paul’s conversion [9:17,22]: Supernatural boldness & power to be a witness of the gospel.
    - vi. [5:32] God gave the Spirit to everyone who obeys; obedience as a mark of His presence.
  - c. What are we actually promised in regards to His manifestation?
    - i. There’s no promise in Acts that everyone who received the Spirit spoke in tongues or prophesied.
    - ii. There is a promise that believers receive boldness/power to share good news to the world (cf. 1:8).
  - d. There is a real, identifiable, discernible experience of the living God.
    - i. Not just an emotional experience.
    - ii. Not just a logical inference based on Eph 1:13.
    - iii. Later, Paul asks “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (19:2).
      1. He expects a person to know it based on an experience, with effects they can point to.
3. [47-48] Gentile believers should be fully accepted into the fellowship of believers
  - a. [47] Peter’s conclusion: Officially welcome them into the Body of Christ through water baptism.
    - i. Since they were already supernaturally baptized with the Holy Spirit, just like the Jewish believers.
    - ii. Their receiving of the Holy Spirit confirms they genuinely believe & follow Jesus (cf. John 3:3-5).
  - b. [48] All the Roman believers obediently get baptized (not circumcised).
    - i. A new covenant: A new external symbol of their inward relationship with God through Jesus.
    - ii. Peter stays extra days to teach the Gentile believers more about Jesus & His Word.
4. Application: Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed in Jesus?

- a. Spirit of obedience in life, to subdue sin & inclined towards acts of love & Christ-likeness?
- b. Spirit of praise that fills your heart & mouth with worship to Jesus, & a lifestyle of worship to God?
- c. Spirit of courage, overcoming fear to give you the will to risk for the sake of Jesus?
- d. Spirit of power (not necessarily tongues/prophecy) demonstrating the reality of Jesus through you to others?
- e. If you can't answer any of those affirmatively, perhaps you have not yet believed & yielded your life to Jesus as Lord over all.

### **We push back against change that threatens tradition [Acts 11:1-3]**

1. [1-3] Opposed by the circumcision party.
  - a. [1] While Pete teaches the new believers in Caesarea, Judean Jewish believers hear about these Gentiles.
  - b. [2] Those whose identity is wrapped up in being of the circumcision party are angry.
    - i. "Circumcision party": Jews who clutch the old covenant tradition of circumcision as a requirement to be part of their team.
  - c. [3] Accusation: Peter went to the home of "uncircumcised" men & ate their unclean food with them.
    - i. Peter violated their Jewish law (not biblical Law of God).
  - d. Barrier: They grew up with traditions/regulations, making it hard to accept outsiders or be open to God's work.
    - i. "If you don't respect our customs, you can't be accepted by us or into God's family with us."
2. We also tend to push back against change that threatens our cultural traditions
  - a. Longstanding traditions, when they no longer serve a purpose, often create more hardship than help.
  - b. We don't just get rid of the old for the sake of change.
    - i. Good traditions mandated by God should be obeyed (e.g., study of His Word, prayer, gathering together for worship /encouragement, baptism, etc).
    - ii. However, we don't worship man-made traditions, which can become idols.
  - c. We also do not abuse freedom in Christ
    - i. Don't use "ridding of tradition" as an excuse to rationalize sin (cf. Rom 7:7).
    - ii. We need to learn humility & consider the effect we have on others (cf. 1 Cor. 8 & 10)
  - d. Human tendency: To push back against change that threatens our personal rules & additional customs.
3. Application: What cultural traditions, customs, habits, patterns & preferences do I have, if God changed at church, would get me in an uproar?
  - a. If our church culture was "too Chinese" or "not Chinese enough"?
  - b. Past examples in churches: Division over type of music, food, dress, people, etc.
  - c. "We've always done things this way" or "we've never done it that way."

### **We push forward when we recognize & trust the work of God's Spirit [Acts 11:4-18]**

1. [4-16] Peter's response: He retells the whole experience
  - a. [4-10] Peter's vision from Jesus: "What God has made clean, do not call common."
    - i. Peter's Jewish cultural prejudices, preferences, customs & exclusions overturned.
  - b. [11-12] Holy Spirit's instruction: Go with the Gentiles "without distinction"
    - i. Without hesitation, distinction between them & us, separation as superior, or judgment (cf. 10:20).
    - ii. God shows no partiality (cf. 10:34).
    - iii. 6 Jewish brothers accompanied: More than the 2-3 legal eyewitnesses required by Jewish & Biblical law to verify truth.
  - c. [13-14] Cornelius' vision from Jesus: Find Peter & listen to good news about Jesus, by which they'll be saved.
2. [15-16] Gentile Day of Pentecost
  - a. [15] Key: The Holy Spirit falls on the Roman Gentile believers, just as He had on the Jewish believers.
    - i. "Just as on us at the beginning": As promised (cf. 1:8) on the Day of Pentecost (cf. 2:1-4).
    - ii. They too start to speak in tongues & worship Jesus as God, proclaiming His greatness.
  - b. [16] Jesus prophesied all His followers would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (cf. 1:5; Mark 1:8; Matt 3:11).
  - c. This is a second Pentecost experience, welcoming Gentiles to be filled with God's Spirit & for the gospel to spread throughout the Gentile world to the ends of the earth (cf. 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:26-27).
3. [17-18] Conclusion
  - a. [17] Peter's conclusion: If God gives Gentiles the same gift of the Spirit as Jews when they first believed in Jesus, then they need to get out of God's way.

- i. Key question: If God is at work, will we stand in His way & push back? Or will we push forward alongside the Holy Spirit, wherever He leads?
  - b. How do we know when something is from God?
    - i. They undeniably saw the work of the Spirit in these “outsiders” lives.
    - ii. They exhibit obedience to repent from sin & receive forgiveness, praise Jesus as Lord over all, grow in boldness & power through a life transformed by the Spirit to become witnesses for Jesus.
    - iii. When God does new things that are uncomfortable, bringing outsiders in, we push forward when we see & trust the work of God’s Spirit in them.
  - c. [18] The Jewish believers fall silent to consider the evidence
    - i. Response: They glorify God, speaking words of praise, worshiping & exalting Jesus as God, & for the work of the Holy Spirit in the Gentiles.
    - ii. Gentile believers are fully recognized & accepted as brothers & sisters in Christ because of the evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work of repentance in them.
- 4. Application: With people who are very different from you at church, if you see the observable work of the Spirit in their life, you must accept them as a brother or sister in Christ.
  - a. Trust must still be earned.
    - i. Don’t hand over your house or car or money indiscriminately
    - ii. We are all recovering as hurtful, sinful people.
    - iii. We still need to have wise boundaries.
  - b. Is there someone you directly/indirectly reject (with your attitude, words, avoidance) who Jesus is telling you to embrace as a sister or brother in Christ?

## **Conclusion**

- 1. Chuck Colson was once described as the “evil genius” of the Nixon administration after the Watergate scandal.
  - a. In prison, he met Jesus, and spent the next 35 years sharing about Jesus through Prison Ministries.
  - b. His conversion was met with skepticism, even by Christians.
  - c. But people can’t deny the very real effects of the Holy Spirit at work in his life to humble him, change him, lead him to repent, obey & follow Jesus.
- 2. Here in Acts: A beautiful, messy story of redemption sweeping outward to beautiful, messy people.
  - a. Jesus is still doing the same thing today, moving His Kingdom outward by the work of His Spirit.
  - b. He crosses cultural, social & economic barriers to welcome “outsiders” in.
  - c. Are we going to push back or push forward with Jesus?