

Katameros: 11:2–18

11:3 *Why Did You Go to the Uncircumcised?*

Peter Accused So That They Might Learn.

Chrysostom: The question was not “Why did you preach to them?” but “Why did you eat with them?” But Peter does not respond to this frigid (yes, frigid) objection; he relies on this profound argument: if they had received the Spirit, how could one refuse to give them baptism? But why did they not object in the case of the Samaritans? For on the contrary, neither before nor after their baptism was there any controversy, and they did not become angry on that occasion but, on hearing the news, sent the apostles for this very purpose. As a matter of fact, even here they are not complaining of this, for they knew it was of divine grace. What they ask is, “Why did you eat with them?” Besides, the difference between Samaritans and Gentiles is not so great. Surely it was part of the divine plan for Peter to be accused, so that they too might learn. For Peter would not have spoken without cause. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 24.¹

Peter Was a Humble Shepherd.

Gregory the Great: For if, when he was blamed by the believers, he had paid regard to the authority that he had received in holy church, he might have replied that the sheep should not dare to find fault with the shepherd to whom they had been committed. But, had he said anything of his own power in answer to the complaint of the believers, he would not have been truly a teacher of gentleness. He pacified them, therefore, by giving a reason humbly, and he even produced witnesses to defend him from blame, saying, “Moreover these six brothers accompanied me.” If, then, the pastor of the church, the prince of the apostles, who singularly did signs and miracles, did not disdain humbly to give a reason in defending himself from blame, how much more ought we sinners, when we are blamed for anything, to pacify those who blame us by giving a reason humbly! Letter 45.²

11:4 *Peter Explained*

God Initiated This.

Chrysostom: The words were not those of the prudent Peter but of the Spirit. And in his defense he showed God as the absolute author and himself as the author of nothing. He said what he did in his ecstasy, “I was in the city of Joppa, and he showed the vessel, as I have said before; and again he said and I did not hear. The Spirit ordered me to leave, and so, after leaving, I did not run. I said that God had sent me, and so I did not baptize after these things, but again God did everything. God himself baptized, not I.” Catena on the Acts of the Apostles 11.4.³

11:6 *Animals and Beasts of Prey*

11:12 *The Spirit Told Me to Go*

11:15 *The Holy Spirit Descends*

To Show That All Was of God.

Chrysostom: It was out of superabundance that this [sending of the Holy Spirit] takes place, to show that even the beginning did not come from the apostle. For if Peter had set out of his own accord and [the Holy Spirit had not come first], they would have been completely thunder-struck. Consequently, from the start he tries to bring their thoughts around to his side by saying, “who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 24.2

11:16 *Remembering God’s Word*

The Eschatological Nature of Baptism.

Origen: The people received John, who was less than Christ. They reflected and thought, “Perhaps he is the Christ.” But they did not receive him who had come, who was greater than John. Do you want to know the reason? Recognize this: John’s baptism could be seen; the baptism of Christ was invisible. John said, “For I baptize you in water, but he who comes after me is greater than I. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire.”³ When does Jesus baptize “with the Holy Spirit”? And again, when does he baptize “with fire”? Does he baptize at one and the same time “with Spirit and fire,” or at distinct and different times? He says, “But you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence.”⁴ After his ascension into heaven, the apostles were baptized “with the Holy Spirit.” But Scripture does not record that they were baptized “with fire.”⁵

At the Jordan River, John awaited those who came for baptism. Some he rejected, saying, “generation of vipers,”⁶ and so on. But those who confessed their faults and sins he received. In the same way, the Lord Jesus Christ will stand in the river of fire near the “flaming sword.”⁷ If anyone desires to pass over to paradise after departing this life and needs cleansing, Christ will baptize him in this river and send him across to the place he longs for. But whoever does not have the sign of earlier baptisms, him Christ will not baptize in the fiery bath. For it is fitting that one should be baptized in “water and the Spirit.”⁸ Then, when he comes to the fiery river, he can show that he preserved the bathing in water and the Spirit. Then he will deserve to receive in addition the baptism in Christ Jesus, to whom be glory and power for ages of ages. Amen. Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 24.9

11:17 *God Gave the Same Gift*

Dismantling a Holiness Based on Exclusion.

Chrysostom: [Peter] shows that he did nothing himself. “For it was the very thing that we obtained,” he says, “that those men received.” “If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus, who was I that I could withstand God?” To silence them more effectively, he added “the same gift.” Do you see how he does not allow them to have less? “When they believed,” he says, “God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus.” He makes them clean, and he does not say “to you” but “to us.” That is, why do you feel aggrieved when we call them partners? “When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance to life.’ ” Do you see how it all came about through the oratory of Peter, who did well to report the events? They glorified God because he had given them repentance. They were humbled by these words. From this point on the door of faith was open to the Gentiles. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 24.10

11:18 *Glorifying God*

Their Praise Was Foretold.

Augustine: “Zion heard and was glad.” ¹¹ What did Zion hear? That all God’s angels worship him? Yes, to be sure; but what else did Zion hear? This is what it heard: “The heavens have proclaimed his justice, and all nations have seen his glory. Let all who worship graven images be put to shame, those who boast of their idols.” ¹² The church had not yet extended to the Gentiles, you see. Some of the Jews in Judea had come to believe, but these Jews imagined that they alone belonged to Christ. Then the apostles were sent to the Gentiles, and the word was preached to Cornelius. He believed and was baptized, and his companions were baptized with him. You know what happened to lead them to baptism.... An angel was sent to Cornelius; the angel sent Cornelius to Peter, and Peter came to Cornelius’s house. But Cornelius was from the Gentiles, so he and his friends were uncircumcised. In order, therefore, that Peter and his companions might have no hesitation about delivering the gospel to uncircumcised persons, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and the others even before they were baptized; the Spirit filled them, and they began to speak in tongues. Until this time the Holy Spirit had never fallen upon any unbaptized person; but he fell on these before their baptism. Peter might well have hesitated over whether to baptize the uncircumcised, but the Holy Spirit came, and they began to speak in tongues. The invisible gift was conferred and removed any doubt about the visible sacrament, so they were all baptized. Now you find it recorded in Scripture that “the apostles and the brothers in Judea heard that the Gentiles too had

accepted the word of God, and they glorified God.” It is this thanksgiving on their part that is mentioned in our psalm: “Zion heard and was glad, and the daughters of Judea leaped for joy.”¹³ Explanations of the Psalms 96.13.14