

# "Because God Says So"

Text: Acts 11:1-18

God grant to each of us this one gift – that we learn, at all times and in every situation, to trust our God and his Word. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

As is probably the case with many who eventually, reluctantly, grow up, I am increasingly amused at how I can both cling to some of the juvenile opinions of the past, even while I adopt and put into practice the very same tactics and connivances that I once condemned. In other words, many of us as adults have no problem adopting mutually exclusive positions.

Here's the sort of thing I'm talking about. I can still rather vividly recall the consternation and frustration of having to deal with parents who clearly knew so much less about life than I did. At age 10. School is over for the summer, for example, and I still had a bedtime that was crimping my style. I would ask why. In my mind a perfectly reasonable question, given the fact that at age 10 my parents and I were more or less peers, and peers ought to work together to make decisions about things like bedtimes. My parents were actually cheating themselves out of my accumulated insights and wisdom by not including me in the decision-making process. Asking "Why?" gave them the opportunity to avail themselves of my insights and thereby broaden their horizons.

Here's how the process was *supposed* to work: I would ask why, they would carefully and patiently explain their reasons, and I would offer solid arguments as to why their thought process was flawed. And stupid. They would offer more explanation, and I would counter with evermore amazing rationalizations and insights. Finally, in the end (assuming the process was allowed to work) they would acknowledge how right I was, how wrong they were, and yield – with thanks.

Instead, however, my parents routinely cheated themselves of all that wisdom and savvy by answering my "Why?" with that most unreasonable of all parental responses: "Because I said so." After which they routinely enacted that most depriving of all parliamentarian tactics, the move to cease debate.

Simply unfair. Worse still, it was unwise. I resolved never to do that as a parent with my own children. When *my* children asked why, I would seek their wisdom and input into the decision-making process. In fact I

remember the first time one of them asked, "Why?" after a command. I responded confidently and without hesitation: "Because I said so." Actually what I think I said was, "Because your mother said so." I am so thankful my children had a good parent.

The basic lesson here is that pleading, reasoning, arguing parents need to take a lesson from previous generations. Children absolutely need to learn, from little on, not only to respect authority, but to obey – no questions asked. There will be plenty of opportunity in their teenage years to learn the why, but that process only really works when they first learn simply to obey.

In our text for this morning, our God condescend to share with us the "why" of why this is so important. That text is God's Word recorded in the Book of Acts, the 11<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 11:1-18** *Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. <sup>2</sup> So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, <sup>3</sup> "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." <sup>4</sup> But Peter began and explained it to them in order: <sup>5</sup> "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. <sup>6</sup> Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. <sup>7</sup> And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' <sup>8</sup> But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' <sup>9</sup> But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' <sup>10</sup> This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. <sup>11</sup> And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. <sup>12</sup> And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. <sup>13</sup> And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; <sup>14</sup> he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' <sup>15</sup> As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup> And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>17</sup> If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" <sup>18</sup> When they heard these things they fell silent.*

***And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."***

These are God's words. They are therefore true and right in every conceivable way. Perfect, from first to last. In this sin-riddled world, how rare and wonderful it is to have something completely and utterly reliable. That our God would richly bless us through the study of his perfect words this morning, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"*** Amen.

There are obviously many dangers of various kinds in our day. I'm not sure, however, that any is more dangerous than group-think. Some of you may have seen the petitions that circulated a few years back asking folks to work together to ban dihydrogen monoxide. It is the major component of acid rain, corrosive to many metals, can cause severe burns, is found in virtually every excised cancer tumor, causes electrical failures, brake failures in cars, contributes to the "greenhouse effect," and it is fatal when aspirated by human beings. Tens of thousands signed various petitions to ban the chemical – which, if you write out the chemical compound, is H<sub>2</sub>O.

The petition drive was designed to reveal just how gullible we human beings can be. Someone comes up with an ill-conceived idea that has the *sound* or *appearance* of wisdom, and an alarming number of people are instantly on-board.

While such things can be dangerous in secular things, how much worse when carried over into the spiritual. Yet it happens all the time. *"I wonder if maybe Jesus only rose symbolically in people's minds"* suddenly becomes *"It's a well-known fact that the Bible never says Jesus actually rose bodily from the dead."* From there it's a tiny little hop to *"You don't actually believe that myth about Jesus' resurrection, do you?"* That is in fact exactly how time-honored, rock-solid Biblical truths get turned on their ear, twisted, perverted, and discarded.

With this phenomenon in mind, we pick up in our text for this morning at this point: ***So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."*** Interestingly enough, not only were there one or two individuals back at the home church in Jerusalem that still believed that circumcision was necessary for one to be saved, there was an entire group or ***"party"*** of them. There was, in other words, spiritual group-think.

You recall the setting of our text. Peter had baptized non-Jews (Gentiles) in Caesarea, and he was summoned by the church in Jerusalem to give an explanation. Our text represents his defense of his actions, given to his

Christian brothers in Jerusalem. Clearly the men in Jerusalem were missing the forest for the trees. We have no record that they rejoiced that also non-Jews were saved. They did not immediately celebrate the fact that human being – who happened to have something other than Jewish blood circulating in their veins – were being rescued from the eternal torments of hell. They were instead obsessed with protocol, procedure, and custom. Nothing new for the Jews. You remember how they had no problem bribing witnesses to falsely condemn Jesus to death, yet wouldn't enter Pilate's courtroom because it would ceremonially defile them, rendering them unfit to celebrate the Passover the following day. Murder, yes. Violate ceremonial customs, never. It would be something akin to the Romans priding themselves on how well they cared for their lions – all so that they could be healthy and vigorous when they were called upon to devour entire Christian families in the Coliseum. Group-think makes such things possible. Everyone did it, so it must be okay.

Nor was Peter exempted, was he? In fact when in a vision God told him to do something, Peter didn't just response with a *"Why?"* but went right to *"No way, Lord."* Clearly he would defend his reaction on the basis of our sermon theme for this morning: *"Because God said so."* In this case, he refused because it was God who previously told him not to eat ceremonially unclean animals. It's probably the same reason the ***"circumcision party"*** would have given in Jerusalem: *"Because God said so."* Sounds fairly reasonable, except for the fact that Peter was having his conversation with the Lord. Peter obviously acknowledged this fact by saying, ***"By no means, Lord!"*** You can't really use *"Because God said so"* as your excuse when it is *God himself* who is telling you to do something else.

The point that all of these folks failed to grasp – at least for a time – was that the time of transition had come to God's Church. It was time for them to move from Old Testament to New. Part of that transition was learning that all of the Old Testament ceremonies and sacrifices became obsolete the moment Jesus said ***"It is finished!"*** on the cross of Calvary. All of those ceremonies and customs pointed ahead to Christ. Once Christ came, their usefulness ended. Think of it this way. Have you ever received an invitation to some special event, only to forget about that event until you happened to find that invitation tucked away in an organizer or drawer? Does the invitation still apply? Does it hold any real value? Obviously not. All it does is remind you of what you missed out on.

The problem was that these men had come to regard the Old Testament rules, ceremonies, and sacrifices as an end unto

themselves, rather than as that which pointed to the event itself. In fact they were so adamant in this that when the Promised One finally came, they discarded *him* instead of the outdated invitation.

So Peter, finally convinced by God the Holy Spirit that things had indeed changed, made his case to his brothers in Jerusalem. Their reaction was most interesting. Our text says, **"When they heard these things they fell silent..."** Why silent? Because they were temporarily at a loss. They couldn't condemn what Peter had done on the basis of *"because God said so,"* not when God himself was obviously now saying something different. In fact Peter's entire defense of why he did what he did was one big long, *"Because God said so!"*

That works, doesn't it? It worked for the Church in Jerusalem; it works for us. The end of the matter in Jerusalem was recorded in the last verse of our text: **And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."** The Jews had to be purged of their last bit of prideful self-love, which was their notion that God saved them because they were Jews, and therefore somehow worthy – certainly more worthy or more deserving than non-Jews. God's conversion of gentiles in Caesarea – irrefutably proved by God when he gave them the same gift of the Holy Spirit that he had given the disciples at Pentecost – that proof shut their mouths, and they seemed to almost begrudgingly glorify God for what he had done.

You and I need to learn that same acceptance based on nothing more than *"Because God said so."* That is, in fact, the basis of our entire hope and confidence. You and I are forgiven sinners. Why? Because God said so. He said so with the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He said so in his Word, repeatedly, in passages like Psalm 103:11-12: **"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."** And again in Romans 8:1: **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in (who believe in) Christ Jesus."** You and I are forgiven sinners. God himself said so. We need no further proof or evidence.

Life then becomes relatively simple for God's washed, cleansed, forgiven children. What are we supposed to do? Whatever God says. Why? Because God says so. This is the rare joy and privilege that is ours – to have a God that we can trust to tell us always and only what is best for us. To have a God that not only loved us in the past so much that he sacrificed his own dear Son to pay for what we owed, but who also loves us so much today that he will not allow Satan to remove us from that good,

perfect place to which he has brought us. How do you know that God loves you? Because God said so. How do you know that when you die you will be carried to your Savior's waiting arms? Because God said so. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Revelation 21:1-7** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." <sup>5</sup> ¶ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." <sup>6</sup> And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. <sup>7</sup> The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 13:31-35** When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. <sup>32</sup> If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. <sup>33</sup> Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' <sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Fourth Sunday after Easter – April 24, 2016**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 210 (Red Hymnal)

"The Strife Is O'er, the Battle Done"

## The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The First Lesson:** (Revelation 21:1-7) It is important, when reading in the Book of Revelation, to remember that John is describing a vision. The images in that vision symbolized truth that God wanted to convey to the Church. In our first reading we see an image of heaven – the New Jerusalem. For mortal man, just exactly what heaven will be like is infinitely beyond our ability to comprehend, so God used pictures that we can grasp.

**The Second Lesson:** (John 13:31-35) Jesus here tells his followers that no one can follow him. Clearly he means that the cross is for him alone. Jesus paid the penalty for sin all by himself, for he alone was worthy. You and I publicly state our allegiance to Jesus by the love we show to our neighbor. This love, however, is anything but permissive. It is a love based on the truth of God's Word, in both what is affirmed and what is condemned.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 433 (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, My Truth, My Way"

## The Sermon – Text: Act 11:1-18 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"Because God Said So"**

## The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

## The Offering followed by the Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 163 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

## The Distribution -Hymn 304 (Red Hymnal)

## The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 652 (Verses 1 & 4) (Red Hymnal)

"I Lay My Sins on Jesus"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

## Attendance - Sunday (65) Ave (47)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/coffee time
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Study
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship meal
	<b>-12:00 p.m.</b>	– Voters' and WF Meetings

**CLC News** – Mt. Zion of Detroit has called Pastor Roland Gurgel. Immanuel of Mankato has called Pastor Luke Bernthal. Pastor Neal Radichel has returned the call to Rock of Ages of Grand Rapids, MI.

**Next Sunday** – Please note that both the Voters' Assembly and the Women's Fellowship have meetings scheduled for next Sunday. As is our custom, a fellowship meal is also planned.

**Voting Membership Application** – Mark Redlin has applied for voting membership at St Paul.

**Church Council Notes** – Five Council members plus the Pastor met last Sunday. Treas. Adams reported March offerings exceeded budgeted needs by \$362. YTD offerings trail budgeted needs by \$1,013. The sprinkler project has been completed and the lawn prepped for spring. The Council will investigate purchasing hearing aids for individual members that would integrate with our current sound system. Confirmation Sunday was ratified as May 8.

**Organ Update** – Barring a catastrophe, the organ will be delivered on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, and installed on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. No, really.