

(b) A still graver offense was alleged. He had practically renounced Judaism, by receiving Gentiles into the church without obliging them to be circumcised. (c) These charges, it should be observed, were made by private members of the church, and perhaps, supported by John and James, who were in Jerusalem at the time, 8:14; 12:2. The democratic spirit asserted itself, the people claiming their rights, as they did in connection with the election of deacons, 6:1-6. So far was Peter from being regarded as Primate or Pope, and infallible. His decision was openly challenged, and later he was sharply censured by Paul for his culpable vacillation regarding the very matter for which he is now called to account. (Gal. 2:11-14.)

2. *Peter's defence.* It was characterized by the utmost candor, and proved successful.

(a) He did not deny the correctness of the information upon which the apostles and brethren acted. He frankly confessed that he had done the very things complained of.

(b) He claimed, however, divine authority for his procedure. He had acted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (v. 12), and in spite of his personal deep-rooted scruples, he dared not disobey. He referred his accusers to six men then present who had accompanied him into the Gentile's house, and knew all that had occurred, v. 12. In his rehearsal of all that had taken place he emphasized two things, viz.: First, his own repugnance to ceremonial defilement, which he had ventured to urge before the Lord, v. 8. Second, what happened as he began to speak in the house of Cornelius—"the Holy Ghost fell upon them," v. 15. What could this descent of the Spirit mean but the Divine purpose in relation to the Gentiles? (d) This occurrence at once quickened his memory as to "the word of the Lord" (v. 16), and His final charge to the eleven, constituting them "witnesses for Him to the uttermost part of the earth," ch. 1:5, 8. The promise of Jesus (John 14:26) was thus fulfilled in his experience, and, with His words once more ringing in his ears and swaying his heart and judgment, how could he withstand God? (v. 17). Such was Peter's defence.

3. *The apostles and brethren acquiesced in Peter's decision.* It is worthy of note, and

should be impressed upon all, how readily and amicably grave difficulties can be settled, when people are led of the Spirit, whose fruit "is love, joy, peace," etc., Gal. 5:22. The decision adopted was momentous in the practical inferences which it warrants. (a) It meant the abolition of the Levitical ritual in all its parts. Its types and ceremonies and sacrifices had served their purpose. Their true spiritual significance was now to be found in the Christian church. (b) Hence the unity of the church—the family, the household, the Kingdom, of God, from first to last. (c) Hence, too, the unity of our race, the brotherhood of man in Christ Jesus. The reception of the Gentiles into the fold of Christ gave effect to His word of promise: "They shall become one flock, one shepherd," John 10:16, Rev. Ver. This is the thought so frequently and fervently dwelt upon by the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27-29; Eph. 2:13-27.

### For Teachers of the Boys and Girls

Even quite young children have heard the older people talk gravely about "constitutional questions," and understand that a question that concerns the constitution of a country is of the very highest importance—whether the king is to rule alone, or the king with his nobles, or whether the people, and all the people, are to have a share in the governing of a country; whether anyone is to be deprived of his rights because of his creed or color. On such points as these great wars have been waged, and on them the fate of nations turns.

It was a grave question in Peter's time, as to who should be permitted to become members of the church and be treated as such—Jews only, or Gentiles as well. And it was a day and an assembly that left its mark on the church for all time, when, at Jerusalem, the conduct of Peter in admitting Cornelius and his household was discussed.

1. *Peter's conduct called in question, 1-3.* A most un-Jewish thing he had done—admitted these Gentile "dogs," as the Jews called them, to church fellowship. High and low, "apostles and brethren" were equally offended.

2. *What Peter has to say for himself, 4-17.*