

The Acts of the Apostles

“A study of the application of theology to the work of the church as a group”

Chapter Ten

God has no Favorites

The Door is flung Wide Open for the Gentiles

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Acts 10:1 Now there was a certain man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort,

Acts 10:2 a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people, and prayed to God continually.

Acts 10:3 About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in to him, and said to him, "Cornelius!"

Acts 10:4 And fixing his gaze upon him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

Acts 10:5 "And now dispatch some men to Joppa, and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter;

Acts 10:6 he is staying with a certain tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea. "

We continue now with more works of Peter and God's continual education of him. Peter was a Jew and his background included the exclusion of the Gentiles from the grace of God. But God did not intend to neglect any person based upon race or creed or sex. It is very difficult when one has to unlearn some core of his religious belief and then to learn the truth. I have had to do this a number of times in my walk with the Lord and I know of many people who have struggled for a long time with some of God's teachings. As an analogy, our muscles have memories and if we improperly learn how to swing a golf club it is difficult to retrain our muscles. It is even more difficult to retrain our mind but that is exactly what God tells us to do.

*Rom 12:1 "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.
Rom 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."*

Renewing our mind involves rooting out the errors and replacing them with the truth of God. I have often watched people struggle with some of the more difficult teachings of Paul who was inspired by God to write the theology book of Romans. In this particular instance God used two people in two different locations to prepare them to meet and to then discuss what God had shown them separately. The result was astounding. God obviously had already started on Peter as we saw in the last chapter because Peter was staying at the house of a tanner. But now God is moving on in Peter's seminary training.

When we are caught up in such training we must trust God and let Him do His work on us. The result will be amazing for us. Luke begins the narrative by introducing us to Cornelius. Cornelius was probably a proselyte of the gate, which meant that the Jews consider such to be outside of the covenant. A full proselyte would have submitted himself to all of the rules and regulations of the Jewish religion including circumcision. We know that Cornelius was a Roman soldier. He certainly also was a God-fearer who was very devout in his worship and insisted the same for his family. He was obviously seeking the true God and that means to me that God was indeed working on Cornelius to bring him into the family.

Rom 3:11 "There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God;"

Because of this seeking there was no hesitation in answering God when He spoke to him. He immediately answered properly to the Lord. God was pleased with the offerings of Cornelius and He had prepared him for this important moment. God sent an angel into the presence of a Gentile and this event is a great introduction to what is about to occur. Meanwhile He had also prepared Peter by bringing him to the point that he could stay with a tanner. So now in the fullness of time God was bringing the two chosen people together for a momentous revelation to the church.

**Acts 10:7 "And when the angel who was speaking to him had departed, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were in constant attendance upon him,
Acts 10:8 and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.**

The angel gave Cornelius instructions in how the two men were to come together. As a Roman soldier he had men under his command and he could send them out to get Peter. So he brought together two of his servants and one of the devout soldiers and explained to them what they were to do. They would then have done exactly as they were told. But as these people were going to Joppa God was simultaneously preparing Peter for the meeting.

**Acts 10:9 And on the next day, as they were on their way, and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.
Acts 10:10 And he became hungry, and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance;
Acts 10:11 and he beheld the sky opened up, and a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground,
Acts 10:12 and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.
Acts 10:13 And a voice came to him, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat!"
Acts 10:14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean."
Acts 10:15 And again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.'"**

God interacts with these two men differently. To Cornelius He sent an angel in a full vision. To Peter He caused him to go into a trance so that he could see a vision rather than an actual appearance. The vision would have been very revolting to his Jewish self. To understand better the reaction of Peter it is best to consider that he understood God's command to be a test rather than as a direct command. To tell God "NO" would be inconceivable for Peter who was now following Jesus as The Christ and the Son of God. But probably Peter viewed the vision as a test so when he was told to eat of food that was clearly unclean he would have viewed this as a test and answered properly for a Jew. He knew that the Jewish teachings were to not eat what their religion taught to be unclean.

But God is reworking Peter's mind just as our minds must also be reworked. Peter was going to have to learn that although the Law was still valid as a way to help us know how to walk in this world as a child of God, the ceremonial laws were no longer valid and they were to be discarded. Of course Jesus also satisfied the sacrificial laws so they too were to be discarded in the new covenant. God was also teaching Peter here a lesson far beyond just about what to eat. In verse 14 Peter referred to eating but God's reply did not mention food. God told him that anything that God cleansed no person was to declare unclean.

Acts 10:16 And this happened three times; and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

I think that it is very significant that God caused the vision to appear three times. Remember that Peter had denied Jesus three times and when Jesus appeared to Peter on the water after His resurrection He asked Peter three times if he loved Him.

John 21:15 "So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs."

John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep."

John 21:17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep."

It is also important for this episode described by John that the Greek words for love were used differently in different parts of the narrative. In verse 15 Jesus is quoted as using the word "agapao" and Peter is quoted as using the word "phileo". In verse 16 the same wording is used. In verse 17 both Jesus and Peter used the word "phileo". It seems like Jesus gave up on Peter! Of course true "agapao" love can only be achieved by a holy person and I am sure that Peter understood that and he would love the Lord more and more as he became more holy. Peter would surely have been fixated with the fact that this vision was very important.

Acts 10:17 Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate;

Acts 10:18 and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there.

Acts 10:19 And while Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you.

Acts 10:20 "But arise, go downstairs, and accompany them without misgivings; for I have sent them Myself."

In God's perfect timing, the men sent by Cornelius came to Joppa just after the vision while Peter was perplexed in his mind about the meaning of the vision. Being perplexed in his mind meant that he was going over all related material in his mind and trying to place the vision in its proper context. The Holy Spirit informed Peter that some men had come for him and that he was to go with them immediately. God told Peter that the men had been sent by Him and that explanation should have been all that Peter needed.

Acts 10:21 And Peter went down to the men and said, "Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?"

Acts 10:22 And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you."

But Peter did ask them why they were looking for him and they explained as Cornelius had told them. Here again we are told that Cornelius was a God-fearer so Peter would have known that he was not a Christian but a gentile who was seeking the true God. A God-fearer was a person who understood that the God of the Jewish faith was to be feared but he had not become a converted Jew. Such a person would be a proselyte outside of the gate meaning that he was limited in his worship of God. A proselyte within the gate would be someone who had professed a belief in Yahweh, had been circumcised, baptized, and professed to become proficient in all the Jewish laws. This explanation satisfied Peter even though he did not have to be given the explanation since the Holy Spirit had told him to go with them without any misgivings.

Acts 10:23 "And so he invited them in and gave them lodging. And on the next day he arose and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

Acts 10:24 And on the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.

Acts 10:25 And when it came about that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him.

Acts 10:26 But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man."

Acts 10:27 And as he talked with him, he entered, and found many people assembled.

Acts 10:28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.

Acts 10:29 "That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. And so I ask for what reason you have sent for me.""

Peter understood that he was being summoned to the house of a Gentile but he invited these Gentiles into his house and allowed them to eat and sleep. The next morning they all set out for Caesarea with some fellow Christians. Cornelius knew when they would return and he had gathered together his relatives and close friends. I do not think that Cornelius knew exactly what was going to happen but he knew that it would be very important because of the angel visitation from God. Obviously Cornelius did not properly understand the event because he tried to worship Peter. Peter responded to this attempt at worship just as any true disciple of Jesus should for we are just men and only God is to be worshipped. When Peter said that he too was just a man he was indicating that he already understood to some degree that the two of them were equal in personhood.

Peter entered the house and saw that God had assembled a group that required a sermon. First Peter reminded them that they knew the Jewish traditions that did not allow for mingling between the races. But then Peter told them that God had shown him that it was not allowed for any mere man to call another man unholy or unclean. Peter explained to them that he knew that he was going with Gentiles to see other Gentiles but he freely came to see them without any objection. However Peter did ask them why he had been summoned. But he came freely without regard to the reason because God told him to do so, but now he did want to know about the reason.

Acts 10:30 "And Cornelius said, "Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments,

Acts 10:31 and he said, ' Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.

Acts 10:32 'Send therefore to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.'

Acts 10:33 "And so I sent to you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

Acts 10:34 And opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality,

Acts 10:35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him."

Cornelius explained to him how he had been practicing the Jewish time of prayer that God had found acceptable. He then told him that an angel had appeared to him and told him to summon Peter to his house. Cornelius was really telling Peter that God had summoned him to this new mission field and that he was to respond to preach the Gospel to whomever God said was worthy. So Peter indeed now understood that people of all

nations were to be called by God. However we will see later that Peter still has some of the residuals of the Jewish ceremonial laws in his heart and he will have to be corrected by Paul. It is very difficult to have to unlearn something before we can learn it properly. It would almost be better to have been ignorant about the topic initially. There are many aspects of Christianity that I have had to relearn because I had been taught wrongly. But now Peter preaches the Gospel message to these people.

Acts 10:36 “The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)--

Acts 10:37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed.

Acts 10:38 "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him.

Acts 10:39 "And we are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.

Acts 10:40 "God raised Him up on the third day, and granted that He should become visible,

Acts 10:41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us, who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

Acts 10:42 "And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.

Acts 10:43 "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.'"

Peter told the truth about Jesus and that He lived a perfect life and that He healed those oppressed by Satan. He told them that he and others were witnesses of the works of Jesus and of His crucifixion and resurrection. Peter told them that God made it possible that only the chosen people were allowed to see Jesus after His resurrection. He told them how they had eaten and drank with the Lord so that His body was a “real” body. Peter then told them that he and others had been ordered by God to preach this truth about Jesus and to tell others that Jesus had now been appointed by God as the Judge of the living and the dead. He then told them how all the prophets had foretold about Jesus and that everyone who believes in Jesus would receive forgiveness of their sins. The above is really the Gospel message clearly proclaimed by the Apostle Peter. Peter certainly intended to say more but he was interrupted by God!

Acts 10:44 “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.

Acts 10:45 And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also.

Acts 10:46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,

Acts 10:47 "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"

Acts 10:48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.”

Notice that God did not allow Peter to finish his sermon. I would love to see such an interruption in a worship service some day! Peter gave a wonderful evangelical message that contained the meat of the Gospel. God does not need an eloquent, theologically correct message to cause His chosen people to react to Him. The people heard the basics and the chosen ones responded to the truth. What a wonderful result when God does the work! If God allowed me to receive His message then anyone can be called to receive the message.

Here we see that all the Jewish Christians were allowed to see the same miraculous event happening to these Gentiles as that which had occurred at Pentecost to them. They also heard these people praising God. Then Peter proclaimed that what God had done must be respected by His people. God had visibly accepted these people as His children and now Peter and the other Jewish Christians must baptize them equally. Surely God is no respecter of people!

Gal 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Peter was now on a life-long education even though he had been trained by Jesus for three years. The Jewish ceremonial laws were to be discarded as well as the sacrificial laws. Of course the eating laws that related to health issues were still to be followed then as now. The body must be cared for since it is a temple of the Holy Spirit. We also are on a life-long journey of education concerning the things of God. We must always be teachable but we also must never compromise the Word of God.

The best feeling about a local congregation of believers that I ever had was when a retarded black lady came down the isle to join a church to which we belonged. She was accepted as a child of God in a very open manner and that event was something like this story we have just read. I saw a congregation of predominantly white, upper-middle class people accept a mentally retarded black lady into their congregation. Now time revealed that the acceptance was not total but it was a beginning. We all must be willing to drop prejudices and truly learn to apply Galatians 3:28 to our minds.

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