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**A0846 – November 16, 2008 – Acts 10:1-8 – The Vision Of
Cornelius**

Acts 10:1-8 Ἄνθρωπος δὲ τις ἐν Καισαρείᾳ ὀνόματι Κορνήλιος, ἑκατοντάρχης ἐκ σπειρῆς τῆς καλουμένης Ἰταλικῆς, ²εὐσεβῆς καὶ φοβούμενος τὸν θεὸν σὺν παντὶ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ, ποιῶν ἐλεημοσύνας πολλὰς τῷ λαῷ καὶ δεόμενος τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ παντός, ³εἶδεν ἐν ὁράματι φανερῶς ὡσεὶ περὶ ὥραν ἐνάτην τῆς ἡμέρας ἄγγελον τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσελθόντα πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ εἰπόντα αὐτῷ· Κορνήλιε. ⁴ὁ δὲ ἀτενίσας αὐτῷ καὶ ἔμφοβος γενόμενος εἶπεν· τί ἐστίν, κύριε; εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ· αἱ προσευχαὶ σου καὶ αἱ ἐλεημοσύναι σου ἀνέβησαν εἰς μνημόσυνον ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ. ⁵καὶ νῦν πέμψον ἄνδρα εἰς Ἰόππην καὶ μετάπεμψαι Σίμωνά τινα ὃς ἐπικαλεῖται Πέτρος· ⁶οὗτος ξενίζεται παρὰ τινι Σίμωνι βυρσεῖ, ᾧ ἐστὶν οἰκία παρὰ θάλασσαν. ⁷ὥς δὲ ἀπῆλθεν ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ λαλῶν αὐτῷ, φωνήσας δύο τῶν οἰκετῶν καὶ στρατιώτην εὐσεβῆ τῶν προσκαρτερούντων αὐτῷ ⁸καὶ ἐξηγησάμενος ἅπαντα αὐτοῖς ἀπέστειλεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν Ἰόππην. (NA27)

Acts 10:1-8 Now *there was* a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, ²a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the *Jewish* people and prayed to God continually. ³About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had *just* come in and said to him, “Cornelius!” ⁴And fixing his gaze on 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. ⁵“Now dispatch *some* men to Joppa and send for a man *named* Simon, who is also called Peter; ⁶he is staying with a tanner *named* Simon, whose house is by the sea.” ⁷When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who

were his personal attendants, ⁸and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. (NASB95)

Alright, Acts 10 is our third geographic transition in the Book of Acts. Never forget that the Book of Acts is a transitional book and therefore by nature it's very dangerous to build doctrine from the Book of Acts. Acts tells us what happened not how things must happen. A good way to understand the Book of Acts if you're struggling with this is to think of human development. You start off as a little baby and grow to adulthood. And we say the normal part period of a person's life is adulthood, when they have reached maturity in the physical and emotional aspects of their being. Obviously God doesn't bring people into the world to remain babies. He brings them into the world to mature into adults. Now the Book of Acts is like the little baby stage as the church grows to adulthood and of course in the physical analogy, during the baby phase of life, life isn't normal, things start to level out about 20 years old. Well that's an analogy between the Acts and the Epistles. The Acts tells us what happened in that early life of the Church but the Epistles tell us the norm and standard for all time. So the Book of Acts isn't doctrine, it's simply what happened, like the storybook of what happened as you grew from a little infant to a boy or girl to a teenager, now that's not the period of normality, though we have a lot of adults today who have made that the norm, life is just one big party, but that period is a growth transition from immaturity to maturity and during that time there's a lot of change, it can happen very rapidly, so obviously it is not the norm, yet large segments of the church, following the world, want to make Acts the norm for all time, but that's not what we're designed for, we're supposed to grow up. So one reason we're studying the Book of Acts is precisely for that reason, we want to find out where we came from? How did the church get started? What's the origin of the Church because to get ultimate meaning you always have to get back to origins. It could be the origins of the universe, the origin of Israel, the origin of the Church, but in any case origins gives meaning. And so Acts gives the background of the NT epistles; Colossians, Thessalonians, Hebrews and so forth, those churches originate in Acts.

Now, last week we looked at Peter in Lydda, where the modern Tel Aviv airport is located and then he went over to Joppa where Jonah set sail. Both of these lie at the southern end of what is called the Plain of Sharon. So let's back up and see how Peter got in this area. First, Acts 1:8, where is the

witness going to go? It's going to go to Jerusalem, then to Judea and Samaria and finally to the remotest parts of the earth. You ought to have that memorized by now. Three stages, and the entire book of Acts can be outlined this way. Stage one, chapters 2-7 the gospel in Jerusalem; stage two, chapters 8-9 the gospel in Judea and Samaria, Peter goes out into these regions and stage three, chapter 10 to the end of the book, the gospel to the remotest parts of the earth.ⁱ

Acts 9:31, here's Peter on a little emancipation journey, he's far from Jerusalem, he's in Judea and Samaria and the Galilee with the witness. And by doing this we said he's a man on an emancipation journey. Emancipated from what? From his narrow Jewish exclusivism, that's what. The plan of God for the Church is one of Gentile inclusivism. And so this idea of one body of Jew and Gentile on an equal plane, coming to Christ in the same way, by faith and faith alone, Peter has to come to grips with this. This is a radical idea for him as we'll see in the food vision. And in fact, even after you think Peter understands he swings back to his roots and Paul opposed him to his face. But Peter's swings just show how very difficult it is to break totally with tradition and go with truth. His problem was Jewish tradition. But just as problematic can be Church tradition. Tradition can be very powerful in the imagination to the point that we make our tradition the absolute and then try to force our absolute on everybody else and when that happens there's a problem. Don't misunderstand, there's nothing wrong with tradition, but when the issue is truth or tradition you have to go with truth. Truth always takes precedence, truth takes precedence even over love because if you don't have the truth about what love is how can you know you're truly loving? All the fuzzy wuzzies in the world don't mean a thing if you don't have truth. Truth is pre-eminent in the Scripture, always, everywhere, there is no substitute for truth. And Peter's getting a lesson on the truth of Jew and Gentile in one body.

And he's marching around this whole region, Judea, Samaria, and the Galilee and in chapter 9:32 he "came down to the saints at Lydda," he goes on to heal Aeneas and what was the result in v 35? "and all those at Lydda and Sharon saw him." Lydda we said is here, Sharon, that's not a city, that's this plain that runs from Mt Carmel down to Joppa. So all through this region the news spread. V 38, "the disciples in Joppa had heard that Peter was" over in Lydda, so they call for him, he heals Dorcas. Result, v 42, "it became known

all over Joppa.” So the word is getting out and this leads to our question. Who’s running the ballgame here, in all this as you go from stage one to stage two to stage three, who’s calling the shots? Is it the positive volition of these believers to the Great Commission, they are so godly that they want so badly to share the good news with the world or is it the Holy Spirit leading the way? Or, is it the Holy Spirit setting it all up? Without exception it is the Holy Spirit unconsciously guiding the Church. We say unconsciously guiding the Church because the Church did not sit down and say, “Alright, God told us to go out so let’s go out and we’ll start here and we’ll go over there and so on.” That’s conscious decision making. As far as we can tell from the pages of Scripture the first Christians apparently didn’t function that way at all. What they did do was they followed the word of God in their own backyard and as they followed the word of God in their own backyard, then the Holy Spirit moved them. It might be a widow controversy, it might be a jail buster angel, it might be the healing of a lame man, it might be the stoning of a believer. But in every case it’s the story of how they just followed the word of God in their own backyard and through circumstances God moved them out.

And so Peter’s been moved out, he’s come to Lydda, he was transferred to Joppa and now he’s about to be called into the northern Plain of Sharon. That’s Acts 10. But before he goes there’s a little divine prep work that has to take place to both parties. A Jew-Gentile confrontation is about to occur. It all starts in 10:1 and it’s a fantastic story, it’s a very important story, just as Saul’s conversion on the Damascus road was important, not because we think so, but because the Holy Spirit had this repeated in five chapters of the Bible. Five chapters of the NT are devoted to the details of Saul’s conversion. And whenever you find that kind of repetition in the Scriptures God is saying, “This is important, if you get nothing else I want you to pay close attention to this,” so here the story of Cornelius is all of chapter 10, it’s the main discussion in chapter 11 and it comes up again in Chapter 15. So God allots three chapters of the NT to this man Cornelius, and therefore we better pay close attention to him.

Verse 1 **Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius.** Here’s the city of Caesarea, it’s up here in the Plain of Sharon. So let’s familiarize ourselves with this city. As we said, this is the city Philip ended up at after heading north on the Via Maris from Azotus. He preached at all these cities along the coast so he was in a very real way laying the ground for Peter to

come in behind. Now he's up here, again ahead of Peter. Philip was sort of like a military scout, he would go ahead of the main forces, do a little intel, work with the people, get some converts and then Peter would come in to verify the thing and follow up. So Philip has already scouted out this area and apparently he settles down here. Also, this is the place that Saul, after he caused his great disturbances in the Hellenistic synagogues in Jerusalem, the apostles sent him to Caesarea to ship out. So Caesarea is a port city. In earlier history it had been a naval port called Stratos Tower. But by the time of Christ Herod the Great decided to remodel it and he made it a big playground for all his pagan friends. It became a pagan city full of entertainment for the Romans and he renamed it **Caesarea** in honor of Augustus Caesar. Part of his entertainment was this theatre that held 7,000 people. Then down in front of the sea you had the Hippodrome, this is where you had chariot races and such, it seated 22,000. Here you can see Herod's palace, the promontory palace, built out over the sea, beautiful accommodations, salt baths, great view. During the time of Christ the inhabitant of this palace was none other than Pontius Pilate. Here's a picture of an inscription that was found over in the theatre. You can see how it reads TIBERIUM...he's the emperor, you can't see the beginning of Pontius in Pontius Pilate, but you can see the end of PontiUS and the name PILATUS, that's Pilate, and underneath it you can't read much but it says he was PRAEFECT of IUDEA and so I throw this in for all the skeptics out there who think Jesus and the gospels are myth. The guy lived in this house. We also know that Herod the Great, great because of his building projects, and when he re-built Caesarea he set up the Roman military base here and that's how Cornelius enters the picture because he and his soldiers were stationed here. And he's the key Gentile to enter the body of Christ, the Church, he's your heritage as a believer. Your roots, yes, in one sense go back to Jerusalem since that's where the work of Christ was accomplished on the cross, but in another sense the place that serves a distinct origin for the Gentile Christian is Caesarea and this man Cornelius because this is where the work of Christ was first applied to a Gentile convert in a Church sense. So you have historical connections to Jerusalem and Caesarea and this is the man.

So let's look at this man **Cornelius**. Cornelius is strategically chosen from within the Roman system. If there's one thing Rome is remembered for it's her military. In the Book of Daniel, turn to Dan 2. In the 6th century before Christ Daniel wrote this, much to the chagrin of the liberal who's

presupposes the philosophy of naturalism so when he comes to Daniel forecasting the future that's just impossible. Well yeah, on natural premises, but on supernatural one's not a problem at all. It all depends on your starting point. Daniel was a man of tremendous wisdom who worked his way up in the foreign administration of the Babylonian government much like Joseph did in the Egyptian government. And while he was there God showed him the future. The background of chapter 2 is king Nebuchadnezzar, he has a dream and none of his sorcerers can interpret the dream so this Hebrew Daniel is brought in and the king's a little suspect so he says, "Alright what's your dream king" and the king says, "No, you tell me the dream and the interpretation of the dream, then I'll know it's legit." So the Lord reveals it to Daniel, he tells him you saw a great statue of gold, silver, bronze and lead, four successive empires and the interpretation is that the gold is Babylon, silver is Persia, bronze is Greece and iron is Rome. And v 40 describes the Empire of Rome. "Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces." That's the military might of Rome. Rome crushed anybody and everybody in her path. Now flip over to Dan 7. Dan 7 is the same as Dan 2 except it's not a statue of four metals it's four beasts this time, but same basic vision, Rome is the fourth beast, verse 7, "After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it..." again the destructive force of Rome in all it's military might and Cornelius, he's a part of this military. We'd say he operates under the symbol of Rome, the eagle and the initials SPQR. He's a soldier of Rome, he's in command of some soldiers in **the Italian Cohort**. So the men in his century were from Italy itself, they were very close to the headquarters in Rome, and we gather from inscriptional evidence discovered in Syria, 69AD that that the soldiers that served in this cohort were Roman freedmen. So let's look briefly at the Roman Military system that these men operate within.

The Roman army was divided into legions, a legion consisted of between 3,000-6,000 men, we would say in the US Army the legion was a Brigade. Then they would divide the legion into ten cohorts, what we would call a Battalion. What we learn in 10:1 is that Cornelius was a part of the Italian Battalion and from Roman Military history we know this consisted of 300-600

men. The Italian Cohort of Cornelius was an Auxiliary Cohort and not of the Legionary Cohort as you see here, but it nevertheless served under the same Roman standards. Then Rome further divided each cohort into three maniples, a maniple is like a company, it had 100-200 men and finally they divided each maniple into two centuries or the equivalent of about two platoons, so each century had 50-100 men, depending on the original size of the legion.ⁱⁱ And that means Cornelius is the head of somewhere in the ballpark of 50-100 men, we don't have all the fine details. But he was responsible for about the equivalent of two platoons. His rank would be akin to an Army Captain, he was an NCO and his responsibilities ranged from taking care of his troops to overseeing executions for capital offenses. He would have been well-paid and men who attained this rank usually made a career of it. So this is his secular status and it's interesting that Luke in his argument to Theophilus, who we think was probably in the governmental structure of Rome, would talk about the gospel making inroads in the Roman military system, the heart of the Roman Empire. Because one of the arguments Luke is making in the Book of Acts is that Christianity was not a threat to the Roman Empire. If Christianity was a band of troublemakers, Cornelius, as a military man of some stature, would never have been involved, and yet he is involved. So this chapter says tremendous things about the character of early Christianity. The Christians evidently respected authority, worked within the system, they were not tampering with the system, they were not a threat to the Roman system, at least from the outside.

So we want to talk about the character of a Roman military officer. Here is a man, obviously he's risen in the ranks, centurion was about the highest rank a freedman could attain and he evidently was a standout in his military career. He had probably seen quite a bit of action protecting Rome and in due course he was elevated to centurion. So we can say unquestionably he was a man of authority orientation. We can say this about all the centurions in the NT, every time a centurion is mentioned it's in a positive light. And the positive thing about all the centurions is they are oriented to authority. They understand authority. This is something that is desperately lacking among Christian men today. Men simply do not understand what it is to take an order. They're good at dishing them out but they're not good at taking them and this is why I always recommend to any young man that's graduating from college who thinks that he might possibly be interested in seminary to

go into the service because you are not going to learn how to take orders inside most Christian work. The only place left in our society where you're going to learn what an order is, whether you like it or not, is the military. There's something terribly sanctifying about having a DI chew your butt out with his mouth three inches in front of yours and he's on full volume and you're standing there at attention and can't do a thing. Tremendously sanctifying experience. And when that happens you learn what an order is and you learn authority and if you never learned it in your home because you had permissive parents that let you do anything you wanted when you wanted, you as a Christian are going to have a hard road to sanctification. And yet it's sort of great, because on the one hand you don't like it, nobody likes it, and yet on the other hand there's something tremendous about it because you can see yourself beginning to see the structure of authority and begin to respond to the structure of authority and you see your own personal growth in your own soul and it builds leaders. Leaders have to start out being followers. And this is frankly one reason why I think there's problems in Christian churches all over this country, that men don't rise to leadership positions because they've simply never learned to follow anyone. Never had a leader; it's just that simple. Men, basically, in Christian circles...there are a few exceptions, but generally men have not been trained in our society. The last generation to be trained this way were those of the WWII era, men who had character a mile deep and when they saw their brothers dying on the battlefield, legs blown off, it was bloody mess, but they didn't go to pieces, if they had the whole company would have been massacred, of course they didn't like it, of course they would love to forget it, but they didn't fall apart, generally speaking. Why? They had character, they understood authority and they were men of character. Today that story is over, men are an inch deep and a mile wide, still watching cartoons on Saturday morning. We've got a weak link in the system now and it's showing up all over the place. We have so few real men left in Christian circles that the pulpits have to be filled by women. And that's a disgrace to us as men. Train your sons in authority. Christianity is on the decline in our country and I think one of the number one reasons is right here. People don't know what authority is anymore and if you don't know what authority is just tell me how are you ever going to submit to the gospel? Because the gospel is nothing less than an authoritative command of God, "You come to Me on My terms and My terms are Jesus Christ and that's it, over and out." And people want to dictate the terms to Him. But it doesn't work that way. He dictates because He's at the

top of the chain of command. But because we're so unaccustomed to authority we have produced millions and millions of men who think they can dictate the system and they're doing it right now, politically, economically, educationally, the whole fabric of our society is just being ripped to shreds by people who have no understanding of authority, no respect, no character. So I find it very interesting that when the gospel started with the Gentiles it started with a Roman centurion, a man who had a thorough understanding of authority. A man who knew how to say "Yes sir."

Now verse 2, we've seen his secular character, now we want to see some of his spiritual character. First, he was **a devout man and one who feared God**. Now look at this, this man is a Gentile, he's not a Jew, his background is the pagan religious cults of Rome. This man comes out of a polytheistic background. We'd say his background was the Continuity or Chain of Being. On the question of the nature of reality, the nature of existence this man was raised in a society that basically adhered to Greek philosophy and at the center of that philosophy was the Chain of Being, the idea that all was one, there was just one extended being all the way from the gods and goddess to the angels, then you had men, then animals, then plants, then the rocks and on down to the atoms. All of this was on a spectrum, they only differed in degree, just shades of difference but they all shared in this unity of being. That was true of all paganism, still is, modern evolution is the same paganism, hasn't changed a bit. Take for instance Dr Henry Fairfield Osborn, curator of the American Museum of Natural History at the beginning of the 20th century: *"When I began the search for anticipation of the evolutionary theory I was astonished to find how many of the pronounced and basic features of the Darwinian theory were anticipated as far back as the 7th century B.C."* What basic features is he talking about? That all being is one, the Chain of Being. Evolution is the same thing, it isn't new with Darwin, evolution is ancient mythology dressed up in scientific language to make you go ooh aah aah, but it's nothing new, its ancient pagan doctrine regurgitated and passed off as something new. And then you go to the problem of knowing in Cornelius' day. In the ancient world paganism said that man knows, that man can know on his own, either through mystery rituals, practices or just sitting down, speculating and thinking, man can basically know all things. Then they said in the area of morals and ethics, what is right and what is wrong is determined by man, that man starting with his own finite resources decides what is right and what is wrong.

Now that was one option Cornelius had. It came to him on a daily basis from hundreds of different groups. But now consider circulating among the millions of people that lived in Rome at that time another group of people, a peculiar group of people, people that never fit. Wherever these people went they seemed always to be misfits; they always seemed to gather in their little ghettos inside the great urban cities of Alexandria, Corinth and Rome; the Jews, the Diaspora Jew, the people who had been exiled to Babylon in 586BC and had never made it back in 516 and didn't want to, who set up their synagogues all through Rome. These were the Diaspora Jews, and Cornelius must have encountered the Jews. They were in Rome, they were in Athens, they were in Corinth, they were in North Africa, they were all over Rome, every where he went, and he went many places as a Roman soldier, he would be exposed to at least some Jewish influence.

And this Jewish influence testified that instead of having one, all is one, the Chain of Being, there were two, there was the Creator and the creature and there was a fundamental difference between the two; the Creator and the creature are not together in the universe; God is outside of the universe as its personal sovereign Creator and man is inside as a finite creature and you cannot bridge that chasm, that is an absolute distinction as far as being is concerned. And then we find out by the Jews that instead of man knowing on the basis of his own resources, functioning autonomously, it is man knowing by revelation of the word of God; the Jews testified that it was the Torah of Moses, that God spoke into history from outside of history and that's how you begin to know. You don't start by your own finite resources. And then they obviously learned very well that the way you live is in accordance with the standards that this God speaks in the Torah. The Ten Commandments were not thought up by Moses; they did not have a congressional hearing to decide the laws of the land, it was the voice of God, He made the laws.

Now Cornelius having faced these two options, it says in verse 2 he **feared God**; it means that Cornelius made a conscious positive volition response against all of this human viewpoint paganism and identified himself willingly and publicly with this despised minority of Jewish people. That was as far as Cornelius had come in verse 2. Cornelius was yet unsaved, we know that from 11:14, because when Peter reports what the angel said to Cornelius about sending for Peter, what does he say? "and he [that is Peter] will speak

words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.” So the angel didn’t think Cornelius was saved but he was a man who was beginning to respond to the light available to him; he was coming out of the darkness of paganism.

And so we want to deal briefly with the doctrine of paganism. The way the question is always raised is “What about those who’ve never heard?” The so-called problem brought up by the skeptic as they look down their nose at you as if they’re so profound and you’re some kind of an idiot if you think Christianity is true. Now the problem is not new and their question is not profound. It is answered right in the Bible by Paul in the NT. And the question has been asked for 2,000 years and the answer has been right in the NT for 2,000 years. So we want to answer from the Scripture under five points.

The first point is that we freely admit as Bible-believing Christians that throughout history there have been billions and billions of people totally unexposed to Scripture. We don’t reject this, we’re not arguing that every person has seen the Scripture or heard of Jesus. We admit they haven’t, that’s why we’re interested in sending missionaries out, because we do believe that billions of men have never heard the Scripture. The issue on the first point, though, is yes, there are the billions minus the Bible, correct. But are these billions minus the Bible going to be held responsible for rejecting light which they did not have? How can these billions of people be held responsible before God, when in fact, they don’t have the Bible?

That leads us to our second point under the doctrine. The first point is that yes, there are billions of people who have always lived and will live apart from the Scripture, unexposed. The second point says that on the basis of God’s righteousness and His justice, God never holds men responsible for rejecting light which they never had, John 15:22. In John 15:22 Jesus said to the people, “If I hadn’t come... they wouldn’t have sin;” I have come, they had a chance to reject so they rejected, now they’ve got sin. And that principle, you can see it time and time after time, point after point in Scripture, and that again is that God holds men responsible only for light that they have got...ONLY for light which they have. It’s kind of an elementary point, but out of the first two points of the doctrine now we can come to a logical conclusion.

Here it is; if all men are going to be held responsible, our only conclusion is they must have light apart from the Scripture. Now that conclusion logically follows as night follows day from the first two points. The first point was that all men don't have the Bible. The second point is that God does not hold men responsible for light they haven't got. Then we can conclude logically that if God holds all men responsible it must be because all men have light other than the Bible. Or, saying this same logical conclusion another way, if the Bible is the only light that men have, then all men cannot be held responsible. That's the other corollary. If the Bible is the only light that is available then it follows that all men, then, since they don't have the Bible, cannot be held responsible.

So let's look at these two conclusions to those first two points: one conclusion is that if all men are responsible then there has to be light outside of the Scripture. The other conclusion is that if the Scriptures are the only light that's available then all men cannot be held responsible. So our third point, we've got to resolve this problem some way; we've got to introduce a third point in the doctrine to settle the issue. What's the third point in the doctrine? The third point in the doctrine is that all men are indeed said to be responsible. Hebrews 9:27, "It is appointed unto men once to die, after this the judgment." If all men are going to be judged then they are indeed being held responsible, otherwise they couldn't be judged.

Now we come out with another conclusion, let's look at this again. Point one, all men do not have the Bible; point two, God never holds one responsible for light which one does not have; point three, all men, in fact, in Scripture are declared to be responsible, whether they have the Bible or not they're held to be responsible. Then the conclusion so far to these three points can only be this: there must be, therefore, light available to all men outside of the Bible. There must be light available to men apart from the text of the Scripture. That's the only way it can be resolved.

And now we come to the fourth point, the location of that light outside of the Bible. Where is this light that is outside of the Bible to which all men are held responsible.

Turn to Rom 1:18. In Rom 1:18 the "some light" that is coming to all men, whether they have the Bible or not, is amplified. This passage, beginning in

Rom 1:18 and continuing through the end of Rom 1 is one of the most important texts of the NT. Whenever we discuss the problem of apologetics or how to respond to attacks of unbelief our theory of response must be grounded on this text. This text controls Christian philosophy, it controls Christian apologetics, it controls all these other areas because it is THE critical passage; that's why we come back to this. Rom 1:18, "For the wrath of God is being revealed," is being, that's present tense, it's being revealed now, "from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who are right now," present tense, "suppressing the truth in unrighteousness." Verse 18 is talking about Roman heathen, it's not talking about the cultured spheres of Judaism; it is talking about people without the Bible and it says these people without the Bible nevertheless are, present tense, "suppressing the truth in unrighteousness." Well, what is this truth that they're holding in unrighteousness to which they're going to be held responsible and accountable. Paul goes on, verse 19, "Because that which is known about God is evident within them," notice the word "evident," it means plain, no question about this, that's a pretty strong declaration there, look at the language, "is evident within them; for God has made it evident to them." And however God showed it to them, since this is Roman heathen and not Jews, it isn't in the Scriptures. He's not talking about the Scriptures here, he's talking about knowledge they have of God outside the Scriptures.

Verse 20, "For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen," present tense, are being clearly seen, "being understood from what has been made." Now could language be any less ambiguous than that? Is there any chance of misunderstanding what Paul just told us, that all men including the men without the Bible are clearly in contact with some light? But the *tabula rasa* concept (man is a blank slate epistemologically), where it's the idea that John Locke had that man comes into the world, his brain is like the blackboard at the beginning of the semester in school, all nice and washed, nothing on it, and that's how you come into this world. That is a pagan idea of epistemology or knowledge. That's not true. The Bible insists that there's no such thing as blank slate; there is no such thing as a person who enters ignorant. Children are God-conscious. They are not nothing; they are pre-programmed for language, they come with many things intact, and these lead to God-consciousness. If you want to know when your child becomes God-conscious the best guess is when they can handle language because when they can

handle language that means they are able to think conceptually and they can absorb doctrine, elementary maybe, but they still can absorb it, but things have to be in place before all that.

So here it says that everyone has some light. Children have light, and it says in verse 20 where they get the light from. "being understood from what has been made." The creation, everyone has creation. And how have they been seen? They have been "clearly seen," look at that word "clearly seen," it's not fuzzy, it's perfectly clear, people see this with 20/20, I don't care who you are. And what two qualities of God do they see 20/20 from God's creation? His "eternal power," that's His sovereignty, His eternal sovereignty, "and His divinity," that He's not humanity, a creature, He's the Creator of this, and he concludes v 20, "so that they are without excuse." So all men have creation, this is the light all men have and it's this light that makes them without excuse.

So let's put this all together so we can bring it back to Cornelius. The first point is yes, there are billions of people who have lived who don't have the Bible; correct. Second point, under the principle of God's righteousness and justice He never will hold someone responsible for light which they did not have. Third principle: all men are in fact held responsible, Bible or no Bible, they are held responsible. The fourth point, all men have light through creation and we call the technical word for this, in theology it's called general revelation as opposed to specific revelation of the Scriptures. The fifth point therefore, is that all men are judged on the basis of what light they have, not on the light they do not have. And since all men have had sufficient light to render them without excuse, therefore that is why all men can be held responsible. Now for those among the ranks of heathenism in whom the Holy Spirit is working and they're responding to this general revelation, God does something for them. The principle is given in Jeremiah 29:13 and John 7:17. Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek Me and find *Me* when you search for Me with all your heart." John 7:17 says, "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself." The point is that if you really want to know more about God He'll get the word to you.

So as the heart is moving in a positive volition mode under grace, God will send you more light. So in Acts 10 we have a few verses of how this worked

out. Cornelius was a **devout man** a man who respected God's authority, he is unsaved but he's responding to the light, he's rejected the Chain of Being and adopted the Creator-creature distinction. He gave **many alms to the Jewish people, and prayed continually to God.** He's an unregenerate man but he's positive to the Jewish people.

Now we have to finish this up rather quickly but the point is this is a man who is positive to the things of God and as a result God is going to make sure he gets more light and in preparation he has a vision, verse 3, **About the ninth hour of the day**, that's three in the afternoon, **he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!"** ⁴**And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?"** And that should be translated **What is it, Sir!** or in military terms, "Yes, Sir." He's responding to a superior officer. He doesn't exactly know the identity of this person but he knows his place in the chain of command, Yes, Sir. **And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.** Now that language is very Levitical, it's the language of sacrifice from Lev 2, when the people would have a burnt offering and the smoke would go up sort of like perfume, you like perfume, well so does God, this smelled good to Him. We'll get into more Levitical language next week with the clean and unclean animals. Verse 5, **"Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter;** notice the military terms, **dispatch**, that's how God accommodates to us, he speaks that language because Cornelius understands this language. Verse 7, **When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants,** ⁸**and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.** So we see the soldier's character, he immediately responds to his orders and dispatches three men, **two house servants apparently and a devout soldier**, these men were all **his personal attendants**, so they're his most trusted sources and they're going to get the man that's going to bring more light, the light of the Scriptures, the light of Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah. I hope this gives you more appreciation for all that went on in this man's life that led up to this point, and obviously the Holy Spirit is putting it together because Peter is literally going to by-pass thousands and thousands of people just to get to this one man and his household.

ⁱ We've been through stage one, the whole thing started here in the city of Jerusalem, Peter was the main character, that's Acts 2-7, the gospel wasn't going out anywhere, it was staying strictly in Jerusalem and coupled with the gospel was a re-offer, a re-offer of the kingdom to the nation Israel. "Israel, will you repent? If you will you can have your kingdom and Jesus will return from heaven." And this goes on until the national leaders murder Stephen, what I take as the official rejection of the second kingdom offer, just as the first offer was officially rejected at the crucifixion of the Messiah so the second was rejected at the murder of Stephen. And that murder is the dynamite that blows the church out of Jerusalem. And so in Acts 8-9 the witness goes out into stage two just like Acts 1:8 said. And finally, here in Acts 10 we have stage three; chapter 10 is key because things now start to go out to the remotest part of the earth.

ⁱⁱ William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

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