

# His Blood Can Make the Foulest Clean

Acts 10:1–48

Studies in Acts #13

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“His blood can make the foulest clean, His blood availed for me.” Do you believe that? I asked you in our last study on chapter 9 to think of the one person in your life that you think is so sinful that he or she is beyond hope. Do you remember that? I asked you that in connection with Saul, “the chief of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15), a notorious sinner, so much so, that God had to blind him and bring him to his knees to be saved. Chapter 9 emphasized the power of God to save even the most stubborn sinner. Here in chapter 10 is emphasized the ability of God to clean the most unclean sinner.

Now, our culture is so full of ways to cleanse ourselves. We can go on retreats. We can do 12-step programs. We can fast from certain foods and drinks. We can meditate. Children, how can you clean your sins off? The Bible describes our sins like stains that won't come off no matter how hard you scrub. In fact, the harder you scrub, the deeper the stain sets in! As we meditate on cleansing from sin tonight, I want you to see this chapter in two parts:

1. *An Unclean Sinner*
2. *A Cleansing God*

## An Unclean Sinner

Who is this **man named Cornelius** (v. 1)? We're told that he was a **centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort** (v. 1). A centurion was a commander of eighty

soldiers. A cohort was made up of six centurions and their four hundred eighty soldiers. We're also told that he was **a devout man who feared God with all his household** (v. 2). A God-fearer was not a full-convert to Judaism. A full convert was circumcised, would send sacrifices to Jerusalem, followed the dietary laws, and underwent ceremonial baptism. A God-fearer was one who was attracted to monotheism and its ethical standards. And as such a God-fearer we're told that he **gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God** (v. 2). To pray **continually** was a way of saying he prayed at the appointed hours of morning and evening prayer. On one of those occasions of evening prayer, what Luke records here as **about the ninth hour of the day**, which is 3:00pm (v. 3), Cornelius had a **vision** in which **an angel of God** spoke to him (v. 3) and told him that his **prayers and...alms have ascended as a memorial before God** (v. 4), that is, were remembered before God (cf. v. 31). And the angel commanded Cornelius to **send men to Joppa and bring...Simon who is called Peter** (v. 5) back to his house.

So this meant he was good, righteous, and acceptable to God, right? Not according to Old Testament law! Under the Old Covenant your diet had profound implications for your relationship with the Lord. In Leviticus 11, for example, we read of the kosher laws. These weren't for health reasons, contrary to the Christian books today and Seventh Day Adventism. Instead, these were visible markers that you were separated, that is, holy, from the Gentiles (Lev. 11:44-45). So for example in Daniel 1, Daniel and his friends would not eat the royal food but only vegetables and water. Later in Ezekiel 4:14 the Lord commands him to eat defiled food to symbolize Israel's pollution with the Gentiles.

Here we have *an unclean sinner*. Yes, surprisingly he's on the outskirts of Israelite religion, but he's in need to full cleansing from the Lord. Perhaps you know someone like this—someone who is not a Christian, but surprisingly is one of the nicest, most honest, ethical people you know. It can happen, you know! But they are still in need to Jesus, aren't they?

## **A Cleansing God**

And who can cleanse such uncleanness? Notice how our text brings this story into full focus with *a cleansing God*. How do we see God on display here?

Notice his providential leading in the references to the time of day here. Verse 9 is really astonishing! I mean, totally unbeknownst to Peter, on **the next day**, at noon, or, **the sixth hour**, about thirty miles to the south in Joppa, as Cornelius' men make their way Peter goes up to his roof to pray **to pray**. God is doing something! Now, don't forget, God is going to teach us how he can cleanse a filthy Gentile.

Notice his providential use of Peter's hunger to cause him to fall **into a trance** (v. 10) and see a vision of **something like a great sheet** (v. 11) that was filled with **all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air** (v. 12). What a strange dream! Then Peter hears this command: **"Rise, Peter; kill and eat"** (v. 13). But how can he do this as he followed God's laws concerning food? (v. 14) So God speaks again: **"What God has made clean, do not call common"** (v. 15). In fact, God re-iterated this three times (v. 16). And this left Peter **inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might**

**mean** (v. 17). It was in that state that he made his way to Caesarea **the next day** (v. 23) and then **on the following day** into Caesarea (v. 24).

“But I thought this was about the cleansing of the unclean?” It’s not about food! Peter realizes this as he talks with Cornelius and his family, saying, “**You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean**” (v. 28). Peter interprets his vision to be referring to sinners not swine! And Peter goes on to take advantage of the captive audience after Cornelius says, “**Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord**” (v. 33).

So how can God cleanse the unclean? Out text spells it out in a series of affirmations.

First, Jesus is the one **Lord of all** (v. 36). There is only one God and he is the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles (Rom. 3:29–30). He sent his word to Israel (v. 36) in the person and work of his Son, Jesus Christ (vv. 36–40), and through his **chosen...witnesses** (v. 41), whom **he commanded...to preach...and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead** (v. 42).

Second, this one God **shows no partiality** (v. 34) and accepts **anyone who fears him and does what is right** (v. 35). We are taught the missionary heart of God, who is not partial, but is good to all. What is it that is **right** in his sight?

Third, faith in Jesus: **“To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name”** (v. 43). Cleansing from sin and acceptance with God, what Paul calls elsewhere “justification,” comes through faith alone. Look at Acts 15:9: where Peter says God cleanses the heart from uncleanness by faith alone. And these Gentiles not only believed in the same God and the same Savior and received the same forgiveness, but amazingly received the same Holy Spirit that the Jews received on Pentecost and the same baptism that those first Jewish converts received (vv. 44–48).

Now you can understand why Charles Wesley once wrote,

O for a thousand tongues to sing  
My great Redeemer’s praise,  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of His grace!

He breaks the power of canceled sin,  
He sets the prisoner free;  
His blood can make the foulest clean,  
His blood availed for me.

In Christ your Head, you then shall know,  
Shall feel your sins forgiven;  
Anticipate your heaven below,  
And own that love is heaven.

Then with my heart I first believed,  
Believed with faith divine,  
Power with the Holy Ghost received  
To call the Savior mine.

I felt my Lord’s atoning blood  
Close to my soul applied;  
Me, me He loved, the Son of God,  
For me, for me He died!

Look unto Him, ye nations, own  
Your God, ye fallen race;  
Look, and be saved through faith alone,  
Be justified by grace.

Harlots and publicans and thieves  
In holy triumph join!  
Saved is the sinner that believes  
From crimes as great as mine.

Murderers and all ye hellish crew  
In holy triumph join!  
Believe the Savior died for you;  
For me the Savior died.