

The Acts of the Apostles

Sermon Number: 17

Acts 10:1-22

July 24, 2011

“The Lord Prepares Peter”

In our previous study in the Book of Acts, Chapter 9, we saw how the Lord Jesus used Peter to heal Aeneas, a man in Lydda who had been paralyzed for eight years. The word of this miracle reached Joppa and two men came to Peter and asked him not to delay to come to Joppa with them because Dorcas, servant of the church, had died. Peter raises the woman from the dead and Peter stays “many days” in the house of Simon, a tanner.

It is remarkable that Peter would stay with Simon, a tanner since by Jewish law touching a carcass made you ceremonially “unclean.” It’s not so much that Peter would be touching anything dead but for him to even associate with a man who made his living skinning animals is quite notable.

But the Lord is preparing Peter for a much wider ministry beyond anything that Peter himself would have imagined at this point in his service to Jesus Christ. Peter is going to go to “school” to learn to overcome his prejudices and how to preach the Gospel to every creature.

If the Lord so wills we will consider Peter’s “schooling” in this message and then see how it was applied in our next study.

Acts 10:1-22

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, ² a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. ³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!"

⁴ And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?"

So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do." ⁷ And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. ⁸ So when he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

⁹ The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. ¹⁰ Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. ¹³ And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."

¹⁴ But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

¹⁵ And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." ¹⁶ This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

¹⁷ Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. ¹⁸ And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.

¹⁹ While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. ²⁰ Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

²¹ Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?"

²² And they said, "Cornelius *the* centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you."

After this event Peter is going to preach to Gentiles; non-Jews who before this vision he would not have had any close association. He was brought up in prejudice against Gentile "dogs." But he learned:

Acts 10:28

Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

As the old saying goes, I am about to quit preaching and start meddling.

Let me first ask myself, who would I consider "unclean" and refuse to associate with? This is not about moral issues this is about ethnicity.

Is there anyone that I consider intellectually, economically, or hygienically superior – so much so that there is a barrier to compassion and love?

Peter has just learned that the “unclean” label has to be removed from the Gentiles if the Gospel is going to be effective in the church.

The lesson for you and me is that we must cast off our own prejudices if we are to serve Christ. For the Jew it meant the Gentile. For whites it means blacks, Hispanics, Asians, et al. For blacks it means whites and others.

In political races it is just as racist to vote for someone because he is black as it is to not vote for them because they are black. Political ideology and race are not synonymous.

What I am saying is that as long as I consider myself better than another human being I can't see myself as a beggar before the throne of God's grace.

For fifteen centuries, from Exodus 19 up to Acts 10, the Jews thought of themselves as superior to the other races. After all, God had given them the oracles of God, the Law, dietary restrictions, and the Sabbaths. Paul deals with this ignorance in Romans 3 where he proves that the Jew is as condemned by the law as is the Gentile.

It is true that the Jews were to be a separate people but this did not involve justification by faith alone. One of the biggest errors made by many people is to confuse the Jews; “God's people” with personal justification.

Ask yourself this question: When you think of the Jews as “God's people, are you thinking of them as being saved [justified]?

“God never justified anyone because of their birth certificate.”

Charles D. Alexander

God promised Abraham that through his Seed all the peoples on the earth would be blessed. One of the reasons the Jewish leaders hated Jesus was because He showed mercy to Gentiles as well as Jews.

Those of you who were in my Sunday morning class last week will bear with me as I rejoice again in something that the Apostle Paul learned and wrote to the church in Rome. This is what Peter is learning and this is what Paul had to learn and you must learn it to if you will ever know the Gospel.

Here is Paul, the man who was Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee, who had been taught from his childhood that the Jews were “God’s people,” and the Gentiles were as nothing to God.

While the racial prejudice among blacks and whites is strong today it is mild compared to what passed between Jews and Gentiles. Now in the church at Rome there are Jews who have come to faith in Jesus Christ and also Gentiles who have come to faith in Jesus Christ.

In the context, then, of instructing the local church in Rome how Jews and Gentiles were to receive one another as brothers and sisters in Christ Paul writes this and notice the emphasis on the grace of God toward the Gentiles.

Also know that as a Pharisee Paul would have known every OT Scripture that he quotes but he did not understand what they meant until Jesus saved him!

So much for the hermeneutic that demands that we understand the OT exactly as the OT writer understood it.

Romans 15:1-13

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification. ³ For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “*The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.*” ⁴ For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. ⁵ Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. ⁸ Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers, ⁹ and that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy, as it is written:

*" For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles,
And sing to Your name."*

¹⁰ And again he says:

"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!"

¹¹ And again:

*"Praise the LORD , all you Gentiles!
Laud Him, all you peoples!"*

¹² And again, Isaiah says:

*"There shall be a root of Jesse;
And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles,
In Him the Gentiles shall hope."*

¹³ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. NKJV

Of course, the Lord Jesus Christ in the time of His humiliation in the body of a true human, made no distinction as to race and that angered the Jewish leaders.

A Bible note: Any time Jesus commended faith it was a Gentile and not a Jew.

Matthew 8:5-13

⁵ Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, ⁶ saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented."

⁷ And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

⁸ The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this *one*, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does *it*."

¹⁰ When Jesus heard *it*, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" ¹¹ And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹³ Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour.

Jesus instructed His disciples to witness to Gentiles and Jews without distinction; but except for Philip's preaching Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch nothing was being done to reach out to the Gentiles.

This failure to preach the Gospel to every creature is about to change in a dramatic way. After Peter's vision, which we just read about, and his visit to Cornelius, the Christians will be motivated to witness to all people without regard to ethnicity. Up until this time nearly all of the Christians were Jews. Of course, they were still Jewish by race, but they become Christians by faith.

The turning point in the early church was Peter's acceptance of Cornelius as a brother in Christ.

The Bible only has to say something once for it to be authoritative but there is an importance attached to something if it is repeated, or given the amount of space as Luke records it here in Acts; from 9:32 to 11:18.

Cornelius

This account of Peter's "education" revolves around Cornelius.

Cornelius was a centurion which means that he was in charge of 100 men. His rank would roughly correspond to a sergeant-major but with responsibilities of a captain in the U.S. Army today.

He was of the "Italian Regiment" or cohort. A cohort numbered 600 men divided into centuries of 100 men each led by a centurion.

Cornelius was a "God-fearer" which meant that he feared [held in awe and respected] the God of the Jews. He was not a proselyte to Judaism but he was very close and would attend synagogue and live by Jewish moral law.

He was generous and regularly gave alms to the poor.

He kept the Jewish times for prayer "always."

We are told that Cornelius did not go the full way to becoming a proselyte by refusing to be circumcised.

Still referring to Cornelius:

Acts 11:1-3

Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. ²And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, ³saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"

Viz. Simon, the tanner and Cornelius.

We are also told that his household, family and servants, feared God with him.

And so we have an uncircumcised man, a Gentile, being prepared by God to stand in the place of every Gentile. The issue of circumcision is going to be the test of the Gospel among Jewish believers. The issue is, is justification by grace through faith alone, or must some outward acts of obedience precede saving faith?

Go a local church a mile from this building and they will tell you that you must be baptized in order to be saved. Legalism is still with us.

And that is still the issue 2000 plus years later.

In the matter of requiring baptism "in order to" be saved I ask these questions:

What must the temperature of the water be?

Must it be running water, or will an indoor pool suffice?

What are the qualifications of the baptizer?

What time of day is correct?

Wait, Jim, you are being silly! Not so, if a thing is required it must be **RIGHT!**

A prisoner answered a question about legalism like this:

"Legalism is a work that is never finished."

So is justification, i.e., being declared not guilty, initiated by the Holy Spirit as He quickens a spiritually dead sinner, or does the sinner have control of the matter with his "free-will" and certain outward acts of "obedience"?

In other words, when Jesus shed His blood, did He absolutely assure the salvation of a fixed number of people given to Him by the Father before the foundation of the world, or did His death only make salvation possible for all, but certain for no one at all?

This is at the very heart of the Gospel; legalism or grace?

Meanwhile:

An angel visits Cornelius and commands him to send for Peter.

Cornelius sends two servants and a devout soldier to Joppa to bring Peter to Caesarea.

In our next study I plan to expand on the providence of God and how He simultaneously prepares Cornelius and Peter for the Gospel.

Peter's vision of acceptance and freedom from legalism

Peter was on the rooftop praying and he became very hungry.

Note how God uses normal needs, such as hunger, to serve a larger purpose.

Hunger is perfectly normal and it is the sixth hour [noon].

Peter falls into a trance and a great sheet is let down from heaven and it is full of every sort of creature that was forbidden to eat under the Mosaic Law.

Unclean animals and birds and even reptiles were in the sheet.

Acts 10:9-16

⁹ The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. ¹⁰ Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. ¹³ And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."

¹⁴ But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

¹⁵ And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." ¹⁶ This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

Notice that the angel only had to speak to Cornelius one time but it took three times for Peter to get the message.

And I will say more about the “coincidental” timing of the angel’s visit to Cornelius and Peter’s vision in our next study. D.V.

Acts 10:17

Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate.

In the next study we will see Peter inviting Gentiles into his house [10:23].

When Peter gets to Caesarea he does not hesitate to enter a Gentile’s house.

He takes along some witnesses and tells Cornelius about his radical change of mind and what he had just learned.

It would be impossible to overemphasize the importance of this lesson learned by Peter. The very truth of the Gospel is at issue.

Jesus is the Messiah and He is as much the Savior of Gentiles as He is of the Jews. This event has been called the “Gentile Pentecost.”

While Peter learned about the Gospel he will later lapse into his legalism and Paul “withstood him to his face.”

Galatians 2:11-21

¹¹ Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; ¹² for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

¹⁴ But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before *them* all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? ¹⁵ We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, ¹⁶ knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

¹⁷ "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸ For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. ¹⁹ For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain."

What does Paul mean by “is Christ therefore a minister of sin?”

If eating with a Gentile defiles a man then what Jesus taught about what you eat would make Him “a minister of sin.”

Matthew 15:10-20

¹⁰ When He had called the multitude to *Himself*, He said to them, "Hear and understand: ¹¹ Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."

¹² Then His disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?"

¹³ But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴ Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."

¹⁵ Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain this parable to us."

¹⁶ So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷ Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? ¹⁸ But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. ¹⁹ For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. ²⁰ These are *the things* which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

The essence of today’s message is that salvation [justification] is by grace through faith alone. Peter learned that in a vision; Paul learned that when Jesus taught him how to interpret the OT Scriptures.

Do you believe that every person is born a sinner and is guilty and condemned?

Do you believe that guilty sinners deserve to be sent to hell?

Do you believe that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners?

Do you believe that what Jesus has already done, when He shed His blood on the cross, is sufficient for you to place your trust in for eternal life?

Let me conclude this lesson by repeating an old saying.

The legalist says “do.”

The Gospel says “it is done.”

Repent and believe in the Gospel.