***Cornelius Meets Jesus and the Holy Spirit***

**Summer 2021, Acts 10:1-48 September 5, 2021**

***The Peter began to speak: “I now realize the God does not show favoritism  
but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.   
You know the message God sent to the people of Israel,  
telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ . . . .”*Acts 10:34**

**Introduction:**

Now, it is to the work of the Holy Spirit that I shall this morning specially direct your attention; and I may as well mention the reason why I do so. It is this. We have received continually fresh confirmations of the good news from a far country, which has already made glad the hearts of many of God's people. In the United States of America there is certainly a great awakening. No sane man living there could think of denying it. There may be something of spurious excitement mixed up with it, but that good, lasting good, has been accomplished, no rational man can deny. Two hundred and fifty thousand persons—that is a quarter of a million—profess to have been regenerated since December last, have made a profession of their faith, and have united themselves with different sections of God's church. The work still progresses, if anything, at a more rapid rate than before, and that which makes me believe the work to be genuine is just this—that the enemies of Christ's holy gospel are exceedingly wroth at it . . .

Charles Spurgeon, “The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit” from 1858

**Scene 1: A prayer closet in Caesarea**

*1*At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. 3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!”

4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. “What is it, Lord?” he asked.

The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. 8 He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

Acts 10:1-8

1) Cornelius is obedient to the light he has (look for more on Lewis’ Tash Principle)

2) Cornelius knows he is inviting a Hebrew into his life

**Scene 2: The following day on a rooftop in Joppa**

*9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13 Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”*

*14 “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”*

*15 The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”*

*16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.*

*17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate. 18 They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.*

*19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”*

*21 Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?”*

*22 The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.” 23 Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.*

Acts 10

1) Fasting principle: Peter denies what is good in order to receive from God what is *tov m’od*

2) Three time is important

3) “common” is a better translation than “impure”

Note 1: God provides Peter with the link between the *koinos* animals and the *koinos* persons. If   
 nothing in creation is “common” then no person can be considered “common.”

Note 2: There are two wonderful plays on words in this context:

1) What God has “clean-ized” we should not “common-ize”   
 🡪 from *akatharos* to *katharidzō* and from *koinos* to *koinoō*

2) The *koinonia* that the church has enjoyed since Acts 2:42 is now extended to all creation  
 creation!

4) Peter is immediately obedient to this new revelation – which isn’t really new at all 🡪 “common” is   
 not applied to people in the Law! According to the Law, people can be

**Scene 3: The next day in Cornelius’ crowded home in Caesarea**

*23 The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along. 24 The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. 26 But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”*

*27 Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. 28 He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”*

*30 Cornelius answered: “Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me 31 and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. 32 Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ 33 So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”*

*34 Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. 36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37 You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

*39 “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41 He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”*

*44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.*

*Then Peter said, 47 “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” 48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.*

Acts 10

1) Both Peter and Cornelius receive the other and retell their God stories

2) The outpouring of the Holy Spirit confirms the work that has already been going on in hearts   
 in Caesarea (and certainly encouraged by the presence of Philip!)

3) Everything Peter does includes the new believers 🡪 one church!

**Lessons for the church**

1) Remember the Holy Spirit (see the title on our poster!)  
 How am I open to the work of the Holy Spirit? Hint: How much is the Spirit honored?

And now another thought. If we would have the Spirit, beloved, we must each of us try to honor him. There are some chapels into which if you were to enter, you would never know there was a Holy Spirit. Mary Magdalen said of old, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him," and the Christian might often say so, for there is nothing said about the Lord until they come to the end, and then there is just the benediction, or else you would not know that there were three persons in one God at all. Until our churches honor the Holy Spirit, we shall never see it abundantly manifested in our midst. Let the preacher always confess before he preaches that he relies upon the Holy Spirit. Let him burn his manuscript and depend upon the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit does not come to help him, let him be still and let the people go home and pray that the Spirit will help him next.

Spurgeon’s conclusion from “The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit”

2) One gospel, two testimonies of Jesus Christ

How does my own testimony reflect the story of Jesus?

36 *You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea . . . . All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him received forgiveness of sins through his name.*

Acts 10:36-43

3) Meeting Jesus and the Holy Spirit completed the already incredible faith story of Cornelius  
 Where do I have the opportunity to encourage, rather than discourage, a faith story?

*45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured even on the Gentiles . . . .*

Acts 10:45

4) One Holy Spirit, one people of God  
How am I engaged in this “being built together” work of God in his church?

11 *Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)— 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ . . . .*

*19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

Ephesians 2:11-22



**Resources for further studies in Acts**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on Acts at [*https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg*](https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg)

Spurgeon has fewer sermons on Acts available than I would hope at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r\_ac.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r_ac.htm) *.* His “Outpouring of the Holy Spirit” on this text is at [*https://www.monergism.com/outpouring-holy-spirit*](https://www.monergism.com/outpouring-holy-spirit)

I really appreciate J.C. Ryle’s essay on conversion in Acts: *https://www.monergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*[*https://www.onergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*](https://www.onergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle)

Alexander Maclaren has an especially helpful commentary on Acts available at [*https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html*](https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html)

Deffinbaugh has a helpful introduction at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts*](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts )  
His Acts series is at [*https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts*](https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts)His sermons on this text are at   
[*https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048*G](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048G) and   
[*https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130*](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130)

George Whitefield has a sermon on Saul’s conversion at [*https://www.monergism.com/sauls-conversion*](https://www.monergism.com/sauls-conversion)

I have really appreciated John Stott’s *The Spirit, The Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) and F. F. Bruce’s work: *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1980) and *The Book of the Acts* (Eerdmans, 1984). For this passage, I also like Kistemaker’s commentary (Baker Book House, 1990).

Carl Trueman has a good analysis of the world’s opposition in his recent essay “Dogma Drives the Christian Life” at [*https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/08/dogma-drives-the-christian-life*](https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/08/dogma-drives-the-christian-life)

Carl Trueman’s conclusion in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway, 2020) influenced my thinking on the church. His third point, the importance of proper natural law thinking, is reflected in Kevin DeYoung’s blog at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/)

# Acts Timeline (ESV Study Bible)

# Table Description automatically generated

### Alexander Maclaren’s commentary on Acts: at [*https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html*](https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html)

### WHAT GOD HATH CLEANSED

'There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, 2. A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. 3. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. 4. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. 5. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: 6. He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. 7. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; 8. And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. 9. On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: 10. And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, 11. And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: 12. Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 13. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. 14. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. 15. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 16. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. 17. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, 18. And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. 19. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. 20. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.'—ACTS x. 1-20.

The Church was at first in appearance only a Jewish sect; but the great stride is now to be taken which carries it over the border into the Gentile world, and begins its universal aspect. If we consider the magnitude of the change, and the difficulties of training and prejudice which it had to encounter in the Church itself, we shall not wonder at the abundance of supernatural occurrences which attended it. Without some such impulse, it is difficult to conceive of its having been accomplished.

In this narrative we see the supernatural preparation on both sides. God, as it were, lays His right hand on Cornelius, and His left on Peter, and impels them towards each other. Philip had already preached to the Ethiopian, and probably the anonymous brethren in Acts xi. 20 had already spoken the word to pure Greeks at Antioch; but the importance of Peter's action here is that by reason of his Apostleship, his recognition of Gentile Christians becomes the act of the whole community. His entrance into Cornelius's house ended the Jewish phase of the Church. The epoch was worthy of divine intervention, and the step needed divine warrant. Therefore the abundance of miracle at this point is not superfluous.

I. We have the vision which guided the seeker to the light. Caesarea, as the seat of government, was the focus of Gentilism, and that the Gospel should effect a lodgment there was significant. Still more so was the person whom it first won,—an officer of the Roman army, the very emblem of worldly power, loathed by every true Jew. A centurion was not an officer of high rank, but Cornelius's name suggests the possibility of his connection with a famous Roman family, and the name of the 'band' or 'cohort,' of which his troop was part, suggests that it was raised in Italy, and therefore properly officered by Romans. His residence in Judaea had touched his spirit with some knowledge of, and reverence for, the Jehovah whom this strange people worshipped. He was one of a class numerous in these times of religious unrest, who had been more or less affected by the pure monotheism of the Jew.

It is remarkable that the centurions of the New Testament are all more or less favourably inclined towards Christ and Christianity, and the fact has been laid hold of to throw doubt on the narratives; but it is very natural that similarity of position and training should have produced similarity of thought; and that three or four such persons should have come in contact with Jesus and His Apostles makes no violent demands on probability, while there was no occasion to mention others who were not like-minded. Quartered for considerable periods in the country, and brought into close contact with its religion, and profoundly sceptical of their own, as all but the lowest minds then were, Cornelius and his brother in arms and spirit whose faith drew wondering praise from Jesus, are bright examples of the possibility of earnest religious life being nourished amid grave disadvantages, and preach a lesson, often neglected, that we should be slow to form unfavourable opinions of classes of men, or to decide that those of such and such a profession, or in such and such circumstances, must be of such and such a character.

It would have seemed that the last place to look for the first Gentile Christian would have been in the barracks at Caesarea; and yet there God's angel went for him, and found him. It has often been discussed whether Cornelius was a 'proselyte' or not. It matters very little. He was drawn to the Jews' religion, had adopted their hours of prayer, reverenced their God, had therefore cast off idolatry, gave alms to the people as acknowledgment that their God was his God, and cultivated habitual devotion, which he had diffused among his household, both of slaves and soldiers. It is a beautiful picture of a soul feeling after a deeper knowledge of God, as a plant turns its half-opened flowers to the sun.

Such seekers do not grope without touching. It is not only 'unto the seed of Jacob' that God has never said, 'Seek ye Me in vain.' The story has a message of hope to all such seekers, and sheds precious light on dark problems in regard to the relation of such souls in heathen lands to the light and love of God, The vision appeared to Cornelius in the manner corresponding to his spiritual susceptibility, and it came at the hour of prayer. God's angels ever draw near to hearts opened by desire to receive them. Not in visible form, but in reality, 'bright-harnessed angels stand' all around the chamber where prayer is made. Our hours of supplication are God's hours of communication.

The vision to Cornelius is not to be whittled down to a mental impression. It was an objective, supernatural appearance,—whether to sense or soul matters little. The story gives most graphically the fixed gaze of terror which Cornelius fastened on the angel, and very characteristically the immediate recovery and quick question to which his courage and military promptitude helped him. 'What is it, Lord?' does not speak of terror, but of readiness to take orders and obey. 'Lord' seems to be but a title of reverence here.

In the angel's answer, the order in which prayers and alms are named is the reverse of that in verse 2. Luke speaks as a man, beginning with the visible manifestation, and passing thence to the inward devotion which animated the external beneficence. The angel speaks as God sees, beginning with the inward, and descending to the outward. The strong 'anthropomorphism' of the representation that man's prayer and alms keep God in mind of him needs no vindication and little explanation. It substitutes the mental state which in us originates certain acts for the acts themselves. God's 'remembrance' is in Scripture frequently used to express His loving deeds, which show that their recipient is not forgotten of Him.

But the all-important truth in the words is that the prayers and alms (coming from a devout heart) of a man who had never heard of Jesus Christ were acceptable to God. None the less Cornelius needed Jesus, and the recompense made to him was the knowledge of the Saviour. The belief that in many a heathen heart such yearning after a dimly known God has stretched itself towards light, and been accepted of God, does not in the least conflict with the truth that 'there is none other Name given among men, whereby we must be saved,' but it sheds a bright and most welcome light of hope into that awful darkness. Christ is the only Saviour, but it is not for us to say how far off from the channel in which it flows the water of life may percolate, and feed the roots of distant trees. Cornelius's religion was not a substitute for Christ, but was the occasion of his being led to Christ, and finding full, conscious salvation there. God leads seeking souls by His own wonderful ways; and we may leave all such in His hand, assured that no heart ever hungered after righteousness and was not filled.

The instruction to send for Peter tested Cornelius's willingness to be taught by an unknown Jew, and his belief in the divine origin of the vision. The direction given by which to find this teacher was not promising. A lodger in a tan-yard by the seaside was certainly not a man of position or wealth. But military discipline helped religious reverence; and without delay, as soon as the angel 'was departed' (an expression which gives the outward reality of the appearance strongly), Cornelius's confidential servants, sympathisers with him in his religion, were told all the story, and before nightfall were on their march to Joppa. Swift obedience to whatever God points out as our path towards the light, even if it seem somewhat unattractive, will always mark our conduct if we really long for the light, and believe that He is pointing our way.

II. The vision which guided the light-bearer to the seeker.—All through the night the messengers marched along the maritime plain in which both Caesarea and Joppa lay, much discussing, no doubt, their strange errand, and wondering what they would find. The preparation of Peter, which was as needful as that of Cornelius, was so timed as to be completed just as the messengers stood at the tanner's door.

The first point to note in regard to it is its scene. It is of subordinate importance, but it can scarcely have been entirely unmeaning, that the flashing waters of the Mediterranean, blazing in midday sunshine, stretched before Peter's eyes as he sat on the housetop 'by the seaside.' His thoughts may have travelled across the sea, and he may have wondered what lay beyond the horizon, and whether there were men there to whom Christ's commission extended. 'The isles' of which prophecy had told that they should 'wait for His law' were away out in the mysterious distance. Some expansion of spirit towards regions beyond may have accompanied his gaze. At all events, it was by the shore of the great highway of nations and of truth that the vision which revealed that all men were 'cleansed' filled the eye and heart of the Apostle, and told him that, in his calling as 'fisher of men,' a wider water than the land-locked Sea of Galilee was his.

We may also note the connection of the form of the vision with his circumstances. His hunger determined its shape. The natural bodily sensations coloured his state of mind even in trance, and afforded the point of contact for God's message. It does not follow that the vision was only the consequence of his hunger, as has been suggested by critics who wish to get rid of the supernatural. But the form which it took teaches us how mercifully God is wont to mould His communications according to our needs, and how wisely He shapes them, so as to find entrance through even the lower wants. The commonest bodily needs may become avenues for His truth, if our prayer accompanies our hunger.

The significance of the vision is plain to us, though Peter was 'much perplexed' about it. In the light of the event, we understand that the 'great sheet let down from heaven by four corners,' and containing all manner of creatures, is the symbol of universal humanity (to use modern language). The four corners correspond to the four points of the compass,—north, south, east, and west,—the contents to the swarming millions of men. Peter would perceive no more in the command to 'kill and eat' than the abrogation of Mosaic restrictions. Meditation was needful to disclose the full extent of the revolution shadowed by the vision and its accompanying words. The old nature of Peter was not so completely changed but that a flash of it breaks out still. The same self-confidence which had led him to 'rebuke' Jesus, and to say, 'This shall not be unto Thee,' speaks in his unhesitating and irreverent 'Not so, Lord!'

The naive reason he gives for not obeying—namely, his never having done as he was now bid to do—is charmingly illogical and human. God tells him to do a new thing, and his reason for not doing it is that it is new. Use and wont are set up by us all against the fresh disclosures of God's will. The command to kill and eat was not repeated. It was but the introduction to the truth which was repeated thrice, the same number of times as Peter had denied his Master and had received his charge to feed His sheep.

That great truth has manifold applications, but its direct purpose as regards Peter is to teach that all restrictions which differentiated Jew from Gentile are abolished. 'Cleansing' does not here apply to moral purifying, but to the admission of all mankind to the same standing as the Jew. Therefore the Gospel is to be preached to all men, and the Jewish Christian has no pre-eminence.

Peter's perplexity as to the meaning of the vision is very intelligible. It was not so plain as to carry its own interpretation, but, like most other of God's teachings, was explained by circumstances. What was next done made the best commentary on what had just been beheld. While patient reflection is necessary to do due honour to God's teachings and to discover their bearing on events, it is generally true that events unfold their significance as meditation alone never can. Life is the best commentator on God's word. The three men down at the door poured light on the vision on the housetop. But the explanation was not left to circumstances. The Spirit directed Peter to go with the messengers, and thus taught him the meaning of the enigmatical words which he had heard from heaven.

It is to be remembered that the Apostle had no need of fresh illumination as to the world-wide preaching of the Gospel. Christ's commission to 'the uttermost parts of the earth' ever rang in his ears, as we may be sure. But what he did need was the lesson that the Gentiles could come into the Church without going through the gate of Judaism. If all peculiar sanctity was gone from the Jew, and all men shared in the 'cleansing,' there was no need for keeping up any of the old restrictions, or insisting on Gentiles being first received into the Israelitish community as a stage in their progress towards Christianity.

It took Peter and the others years to digest the lesson given on the housetop, but he began to put it in practice that day. How little he knew the sweep of the truth then declared to him! How little we have learned it yet! All exclusiveness which looks down on classes or races, all monkish asceticism which taboos natural appetites and tastes, all morbid scrupulosity which shuts out from religious men large fields of life, all Pharisaism which says 'The temple of the Lord are we,' are smitten to dust by the great words which gather all men into the same ample, impartial divine love, and, in another aspect, give Christian culture and life the charter of freest use of all God's fair world, and place the distinction between clean and unclean in the spirit of the user rather than in the thing used. 'Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled… is nothing pure.'

### 'GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS'

'And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, 31. And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. 32. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea-side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. 83. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that art commanded thee of God. 34. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: 35. But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him. 35. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all:) 37. That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; 38. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him. 39. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: 40. Him God raised up the third day, and shewed Him openly; 41. Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead. 42. And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. 43. To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins. 44. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.'—ACTS x. 30-44.

This passage falls into three parts: Cornelius's explanation, Peter's sermon, and the descent of the Spirit on the new converts. The last is the most important, and yet is told most briefly. We may surely recognise the influence of Peter's personal reminiscences in the scale of the narrative, and may remember that Luke and Mark were thrown together in later days.

I. Cornelius repeats what his messengers had already told Peter, but in fuller detail. He tells how he was occupied when the angel appeared. He was keeping the Jewish hour of prayer, and the fact that the vision came to him as he prayed had attested to him its heavenly origin. If we would see angels, the most likely place to behold them is in the secret place of prayer. He tells, too, that the command to send for Peter was a consequence of God's remembrance of his prayer ('therefore,' verse 32). His prayers and alms showed that he was 'of the light,' and therefore he was directed to what would yield further light.

The command to send for Peter is noteworthy in two respects. It was, first, a test of humility and obedience. Cornelius, as a Roman officer, would be tempted to feel the usual contempt for one of the subject race, and, unless his eagerness to know more of God's will overbore his pride, to kick at the idea of sending to beg the favour of the presence and instruction of a Jew, and of one, too, who could find no better quarters than a tanner's house. The angel's voice commanded, but it did not compel. Cornelius bore the test, and neither waived aside the vision as a hallucination to which it was absurd for a practical man to attend, nor recoiled from the lowliness of the proposed teacher. He pocketed official and racial loftiness, and, as he emphasises, 'forthwith' despatched his message. It was as if an English official in the Punjab had been sent to a Sikh 'Guru' for teaching.

The other remarkable point about the command is that Philip was probably in Caesarea at the time. Why should Peter have been brought, then, by two visions and two long journeys? The subsequent history explains why. For the storm of criticism in the Jerusalem church provoked by Cornelius's baptism would have raged with tenfold fury if so revolutionary an act had been done by any less authoritative person than the leader of the Apostles. The Lord would stamp His own approval on the deed which marked so great an expansion of the Church, and therefore He makes the first of the Apostles His agent, and that by a double vision.

'Thou hast well done that thou art come,'—a courteous welcome, with just a trace of the doubt which had occupied Cornelius during the 'four days,' whether this unknown Jew would obey so strange an invitation. Courtesy and preparedness to receive the unknown message beautifully blend in Cornelius's closing words, which do not directly ask Peter to speak, but declare the auditors' eagerness to hear, as well as their confidence that what he says will be God's voice.

A variant reading in verse 33 gives 'in thy sight' for 'in the sight of God,' and has much to recommend it. But in any case we have here the right attitude for us all in the presence of the uttered will and mind of God. Where such open-eared and open-hearted preparedness marks the listeners, feebler teachers than Peter will win converts. The reason why much earnest Christian teaching is vain is the indifference and non-expectant attitude of the hearers, who are not hearkeners. Seed thrown on the wayside is picked up by the birds.

II. Peter's sermon is, on the whole, much like his other addresses which are abundantly reported in the early part of the Acts. The great business of the preachers then was to tell the history of Jesus. Christianity is, first, a recital of historical events, from which, no doubt, principles are deduced, and which necessarily lead on to doctrines; but the facts are first.

But the familiar story is told to Cornelius with some variation of tone. And it is prefaced by a great word, which crystallises the large truth that had sprung into consciousness and startling power in Peter, as the result of his own and Cornelius's experience. He had not previously thought of God as 'a respecter of persons,' but the conviction that He was not had never blazed with such sun-clearness before him as it did now. Jewish narrowness had, unconsciously to himself, somewhat clouded it; but these four days had burned in on him, as if it were a new truth, that 'in every nation' there may be men accepted of God, because they 'fear Him and work righteousness.'

That great saying is twisted from its right meaning when it is interpreted as discouraging the efforts of Christians to carry the Gospel to the heathen; for, if the 'light of nature' is sufficient, what was Peter sent to Caesarea for? But it is no less maltreated when evangelical Christians fail to grasp its world-wide significance, or doubt that in lands where Christ's name has not been proclaimed there are souls groping for the light, and seeking to obey the law written on their hearts. That there are such, and that such are 'accepted of Him,' and led by His own ways to the fuller light, is obviously taught in these words, and should be a welcome thought to us all.

The tangled utterances which immediately follow, sound as if speech staggered under the weight of the thoughts opening before the speaker. Whatever difficulty attends the construction, the intention is clear,—to contrast the limited scope of the message, as confined to the children of Israel, with its universal destination as now made clear. The statement which in the Authorised and Revised Versions is thrown into a parenthesis is really the very centre of the Apostle's thought. Jesus, who has hitherto been preached to Israel, is 'Lord of all,' and the message concerning Him is now to be proclaimed, not in vague outline and at second hand, as it had hitherto reached Cornelius, but in full detail, and as a message in which he was concerned.

Contrast the beginning and the ending of the discourse,—'the word sent unto the children of Israel' and 'every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins.' A remarkable variation in the text is suggested by Blass in his striking commentary, who would omit 'Lord' and read, 'The word which He sent to the children of Israel, bringing the good tidings of peace through Jesus Christ,—this [word] belongs to all.' That reading does away with the chief difficulties, and brings out clearly the thought which is more obscurely expressed in a contorted sentence by the present reading.

The subsequent *resume* of the life of Jesus is substantially the same as is found in Peter's other sermons. But we may note that the highest conceptions of our Lord's nature are not stated. It is hard to suppose that Peter after Pentecost had not the same conviction as burned in his confession, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' But in these early discourses neither the Divinity and Incarnation nor the atoning sacrifice of Jesus is set forth. He is the Christ, 'anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power.' God is with Him (Nicodemus had got as far as that). He is 'ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead.'

We note, too, that His teaching is not touched upon, nor any of the profounder aspects of His work as the Revealer of God, but His beneficence and miraculous deliverances of devil-ridden men. His death is declared, but without any of the accusations of His murderers, which, like lance-thrusts, 'pricked' Jewish hearers. Nor is the efficacy of that death as the sacrifice for the world's sin touched upon, but it is simply told as a fact, and set in contrast with the Resurrection. These were the plain facts which had first to be accepted.

The only way of establishing facts is by evidence of eye-witnesses. So Peter twice (verses 39, 41) adduces his own and his colleagues' evidence. But the facts are not yet a gospel, unless they are further explained as well as established. Did such things happen? The answer is, 'We saw them.' What did they mean? The answer begins by adducing the 'witness' of the Apostles to a different order of truths, which requires a different sort of witness. Jesus had bidden them 'testify' that He is to be Judge of living and dead; that is, of all mankind. Their witness to that can only rest on His word.

Nor is that all. There is yet another body of 'witnesses' to yet another class of truths. 'All the prophets' bear witness to the great truth which makes the biography of the Man the gospel for all men,—that the deepest want of all men is satisfied through the name which Peter ever rang out as all-powerful to heal and bless. The forgiveness of sins through the manifested character and work of Jesus Christ is given on condition of faith to any and every one who believes, be he Jew or Gentile, Galilean fisherman or Roman centurion. Cornelius may have known little of the prophets, but he knew the burden of sin. He did not know all that we know of Jesus, and of the way in which forgiveness is connected with His work, but he did know now that it was connected, and that this Jesus was risen from the dead, and was to be the Judge. His faith went out to that Saviour, and as he heard he believed.

III. Therefore the great gift, attesting the divine acceptance of him and the rest of the hearers, came at once. There had been no confession of their faith, much less had there been baptism, or laying on of Apostolic hands. The sole qualification and condition for the reception of the Spirit which John lays down in his Gospel when he speaks of the 'Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive,' was present here, and it was enough. Peter and his brethren might have hesitated about baptizing an uncircumcised believer. The Lord of the Church showed Peter that He did not hesitate.

So, like a true disciple, Peter followed Christ's lead, and though 'they of the circumcision' were struck with amazement, he said to himself, 'Who am I, that I should withstand God?' and opened his heart to welcome these new converts as possessors of 'like precious faith' as was demonstrated by their possession of the same Spirit. Would that Peter's willingness to recognise all who manifest the Spirit of Christ, whatever their relation to ecclesiastical regulations, had continued the law and practice of the Church!

### PETER'S APOLOGIA

'And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, 3. Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. 4. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, 5. I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: 6. Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 7. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay, and eat. 8. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. 9. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 10. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. 11. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. 12. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: 13. And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; 14. Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. 15. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. 16. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. 17. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? 18. When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.'—ACTS xi. 1-18.

Peter's action in regard to Cornelius precipitated a controversy which was bound to come if the Church was to be anything more than a Jewish sect. It brought to light the first tendency to form a party in the Church. 'They… of the circumcision' were probably 'certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed,' and were especially zealous for all the separating prescriptions of the ceremonial law. They were scarcely a party as yet, but the little rift was destined to grow, and they became Paul's bitterest opponents through all his life, dogging him with calumnies and counterworking his toil. It is a black day for a Church when differences of opinion lead to the formation of cliques. Zeal for truth is sadly apt to enlist spite, malice, and blindness to a manifest work of God, as its allies.

Poor Peter, no doubt, expected that the brethren would rejoice with him in the extension of the Gospel to 'the Gentiles,' but his reception in Jerusalem was very unlike his hopes. The critics did not venture to cavil at his preaching to Gentiles. Probably none of them had any objection to such being welcomed into the Church, for they can scarcely have wished to make the door into it narrower than that into the synagogue, but they insisted that there was no way in but through the synagogue. By all means, said they, let Gentiles come, but they must first become Jews, by submitting to circumcision and living as Jews do. Thus they did not attack Peter for preaching to the Roman centurion and his men, but for eating with them. That eating not only was a breach of the law, but it implied the reception of Cornelius and his company into the household of God, and so destroyed the whole fabric of Jewish exclusiveness. We condemn such narrowness, but do many of us not practise it in other forms? Wherever Christians demand adoption of external usages, over and above exercise of penitent faith, as a condition of brotherly recognition, they are walking in the steps of them 'of the circumcision.'

Peter's answer to the critics is the true answer to all similar hedging up of the Church, for he contents himself with showing that he was only following God's action in every step of the way which he took, and that God, by the gift of the divine Spirit, had shown that He had taken these uncircumcised men into His fellowship, before Peter dared to 'eat with them.' He points to four facts which show God's hand in the matter, and thinks that he has done enough to vindicate himself thereby. The first is his vision on the housetop. He tells that he was praying when it came, and what God shows to a praying spirit is not likely to mislead. He tells that he was 'in a trance,'—a condition in which prophets had of old received their commands. That again was a guarantee for the divine origin of the vision in the eyes of every Jew, though nowadays it is taken by anti-supernaturalists as a demonstration of its morbidness and unreliableness. He tells of his reluctance to obey the command to 'kill and eat.' A flash of the old brusque spirit impelled his flat refusal, 'Not so, Lord!' and his daring to argue with his Lord still, as he had done with Him on earth. He tells of the interpreting and revolutionary word, evoked by his audacious objection, and then he tells how 'this was done thrice,' so that there could be no mistake in his remembrance of it, and then that the whole was drawn up into heaven,—a sign that the purpose of the vision was accomplished when that word was spoken. What, then, was the meaning of it?

Clearly it swept away at once the legal distinction of clean and unclean meats, and of it, too, may be spoken what Mark, Peter's mouthpiece, writes of earthly words of Christ's: 'This He said, making all meats clean.' But with the sweeping away of that distinction much else goes, for it necessarily involves the abrogation of the whole separating ordin ances of the law, and of the distinction between clean and unclean persons. Its wider application was not seen at the moment, but it flashed on him, no doubt, when face to face with Cornelius. God had cleansed him, in that his prayers had 'gone up for a memorial before God,' and so Peter saw that 'in every nation,' and not among Jews only, there might be men cleansed by God. What was true of Cornelius must be true of many others. So the whole distinction between Jew and Gentile was cut up by the roots. Little did Peter know the width of the principle revealed to him then, as all of us know but little of the full application of many truths which we believe. But he obeyed so much of the command as he understood, and more of it gradually dawned on his mind, as will always be the case if we obey what we know.

The second fact was the coincident arrival of the messengers and the distinct command to accompany them. Peter could distinguish quite assuredly his own thoughts from divine instructions, as his account of the dialogue in the trance shows. How he distinguished is not told; that he distinguished is. The coincidence in time clearly pointed to one divine hand working at both ends of the line,—Caesarea and Joppa. It interpreted the vision which had 'much perplexed' Peter as to what it 'might mean.' But he was not left to interpret it by his own pondering. The Spirit spoke authoritatively, and the whole force of his justification of himself depends on the fact that he knew that the impulse which made him set out to Caesarea was not his own. If the reading of the Revised Version is adopted in verse 12, 'making no distinction,' the command plainly referred to the vision, and showed Peter that he was to make no distinction of 'clean and unclean' in his intercourse with these Gentiles.

The third fact is the vision to Cornelius, of which he was told on arriving. The two visions fitted into each other, confirmed each other, interpreted each other. We may estimate the greatness of the step in the development of the Church which the admission of Cornelius into it made, and the obstacles on both sides, by the fact that both visions were needed to bring these two men together. Peter would never have dreamed of going with the messengers if he had not had his narrowness beaten out of him on the housetop, and Cornelius would never have dreamed of sending to Joppa if he had not seen the angel. The cleft between Jew and Gentile was so wide that God's hand had to be applied on both sides to press the separated parts together. He had plainly done it, and that was Peter's defence.

The fourth fact is the gift of the Spirit to these Gentiles. That is the crown of Peter's vindication, and his question, 'Who was I, that I could withstand God?' might be profitably pondered and applied by those whose ecclesiastical theories oblige them to deny the 'orders' and the 'validity of the sacraments' and the very name of a Church, to bodies of Christians who do not conform to their polity. If God, by the gift of His Spirit manifest in its fruits, owns them, they have the true 'notes of the Church,' and 'they of the circumcision' who recoil from recognising them do themselves more harm thereby than they inflict on these. 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God,' even though some brother may be 'angry' that the Father welcomes them.

# The Perfecting of Peter (Acts 9:32-10:48)

 Bob Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048*](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048)

### Introduction[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P19_6765)

Matthew and Luke have already introduced us to a centurion. Luke’s account particularly serves as a backdrop to our text in the Book of Acts:

1 After Jesus had finished teaching all this to the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 A centurion there had a slave who was highly regarded, but who was sick and at the point of death. 3 When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. 4 When they came to Jesus, they urged him earnestly, “He is worthy to have you do this for him, 5 because he loves our nation, and even built our synagogue.” 6 So Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. 7 That is why I did not presume to come to you. Instead, say the word, and my servant must be healed. 8 For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” 9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him. He turned and said to the crowd that followed him, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith!” 10 So when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave well” ([Luke 7:1-10](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [Matthew 8:5-13](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Luke’s earlier text is relevant to our passage in Acts in several ways. Here, Jesus deals with a devout centurion, a centurion much like Cornelius. The descriptions of these two centurions are quite similar, in that both men are pious and are well regarded by the Jews. In Luke’s Gospel, the centurion urges Jesus not to come to his house, while in Acts, Cornelius does invite Peter into his home (just as Peter had invited his servants into the home in which he was staying). Finally, Jesus commends the faith of the centurion ([Luke 7:9](javascript:%7b%7d)). Matthew goes into greater detail:

5 When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him asking for help: 6 “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible anguish.” 7 Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him.” 8 But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Instead, just say the word and my servant will be healed. 9 For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to this one, ‘Go’ and he goes, and to another ‘Come’ and he comes, and to my slave ‘Do this’ and he does it.” 10 When Jesus heard this he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “ **I tell you the truth, I have not found such faith in anyone in Israel! 11 I tell you, many will come from the east and west to share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**.” 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go; just as you believed, it will be done for you.” And the servant was healed at that hour ([Matthew 8:5-13](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

In other words, Jesus says that because of his faith, this Gentile centurion will enter into the blessings of the kingdom of heaven, while many Jews will be cast into outer darkness (hell). The significance of these observations will become clear as we study our text in Acts.

I have chosen to end this message at [Acts 10:35](javascript:%7b%7d) because the focus of this lesson is on Peter. It is Peter who is being perfected in our text, and thus it is Peter who becomes a **“fulfilled Jew”** in this passage. In our next lesson, we will consider the impact of Peter’s visit on Cornelius and on those Gentiles gathered with him, as well as upon the Jews. I believe the lesson God teaches Peter in [Acts 10](javascript:%7b%7d) and 11 is one of the most prominent and one of the most crucial theological truths in the Book of Acts. These chapters are the “high water mark” of Acts, theologically speaking. Therefore, we must be sure to get the message God was teaching Peter.

### Peter Heals Aeneas at Lydda [Acts 9:32-35](javascript:%7b%7d)

32 Now as Peter was traveling around from place to place, he also came down to the saints who lived in Lydda. 33 He found there a man named Aeneas who had been confined to a mattress for eight years because he was paralyzed. 34 Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Get up and make your own bed!” And immediately he got up. 35 All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord ([Acts 9:32-35](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Peter has boldly proclaimed the gospel in Jerusalem. In [Acts 8](javascript:%7b%7d), Peter and John went down to Samaria when they heard that many had trusted in Jesus. It was not until these two apostles arrived and laid their hands on the new believers that the Spirit came upon them in power. After departing from Samaria, Peter visited a number of Israelite cities to which the saints in Jerusalem had scattered (see [Acts 8:1, 4](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.). In our text, Peter first visits Lydda, then Joppa, and finally Caesarea.[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P29_12274)

There are a group of believers in Lydda ([Acts 9:32](javascript:%7b%7d)). Aeneas may well have been one of these believers, though we cannot say for sure. Nevertheless, Peter encounters Aeneas, a man whose paralysis had confined him to a bed for eight years ([Acts 9:33](javascript:%7b%7d)). Seeing his condition, Peter spoke up, telling this man that Jesus the Christ had healed him ([Acts 8:34](javascript:%7b%7d)). Furthermore, Peter instructed Aeneas to get up and take his bed with him. Aeneas did get up and walk and presumably took his bed with him, which inspired many others to trust in Jesus for salvation.

What is of particular interest to me is that this healing is similar to the healing of the paralytic in [Luke 5](javascript:%7b%7d):[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P32_13165)

18 Just then some men showed up, carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They were trying to bring him in and place him before Jesus. 19 But since they found no way to carry him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down on the stretcher through the roof tiles right in front of Jesus. 20 When Jesus saw their faith he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” 21 Then the experts in the law and the Pharisees began to think to themselves, “Who is this man who is uttering blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 22 When Jesus perceived their hostile thoughts, he said to them, “Why are you raising objections within yourselves? 23 Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? 24 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – he said to the paralyzed man – “ **I tell you, stand up, take your stretcher and go home**.” 25 Immediately he stood up before them, picked up the stretcher he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God. 26 Then astonishment seized them all, and they glorified God. They were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen incredible things today” ([Luke 5:18-26](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine)

Two similarities are evident. First, the condition of the man in Luke’s Gospel is similar to that of the lame man in [Acts 9:32-35](javascript:%7b%7d). Both men were paralyzed. Second, the words Peter spoke to Aeneas are similar to those spoken by Jesus:

“. . . stand up, take your stretcher and go home” ([Luke 5:24](javascript:%7b%7d)).

“Get up and make your own bed!” ([Acts 9:34](javascript:%7b%7d))

We will see more about this similarity later in the lesson.

### Peter and the Raising of Dorcas at Joppa [Acts 9:36-43](javascript:%7b%7d)

36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which in translation means Dorcas). She was continually doing good deeds and acts of charity. 37 At that time she became sick and died. When they had washed her body, they placed it in an upstairs room. 38 Because Lydda was near Joppa, when the disciples heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Come to us without delay.” 39 So Peter got up and went with them, and when he arrived they brought him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him, crying and showing him the tunics and other clothing Dorcas used to make while she was with them. 40 But Peter sent them all outside, knelt down, and prayed. Turning to the body, he said, “ Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. 41 He gave her his hand and helped her get up. Then he called the saints and widows and presented her alive. 42 This became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 So Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a man named Simon, a tanner ([Acts 9:36-43](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Peter was some distance away, and thus Dorcas would have been dead for a considerable period of time before he arrived – long enough that raising her to life would have been a substantial miracle (similar to the raising of Lazarus in [John 11](javascript:%7b%7d)). This is the first record of Peter (or any other apostle) raising someone from the dead. The power of the Lord was clearly upon Peter.

What is most striking about this miracle is its similarity to the raising of the daughter of Jairus as recorded in [Mark 5](javascript:%7b%7d):[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P42_16453)

35 While he was still speaking, people came from the synagogue ruler’s house saying, “Your daughter has died. Why trouble the teacher any longer?” 36 But Jesus, paying no attention to what was said, told the synagogue ruler, “Do not be afraid; just believe.” 37 He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of [James. 38](javascript:%7b%7d) They came to the house of the synagogue ruler where he saw noisy confusion and people weeping and wailing loudly. 39 When he entered he said to them, “Why are you distressed and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep.” 40 And they began making fun of him. But he put them all outside and he took the child’s father and mother and his own companions and went into the room where the child was. 41 Then, gently taking the child by the hand, he said to her, “ **Talitha koum**,” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up.” 42 The girl got up at once and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). They were completely astonished at this. 43 He strictly ordered that no one should know about this, and told them to give her something to eat ([Mark 5:35-43](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Peter not only does what Jesus has done; he does so speaking similar words.

### Double Vision [Acts 10:1-16](javascript:%7b%7d)

1 Now there was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort. 2 He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was all his household; he did many acts of charity for the people and prayed to God regularly. 3 About three o’clock one afternoon he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, “Cornelius.” 4 Staring at him and becoming greatly afraid, Cornelius replied, “What is it, Lord?” The angel said to him, “Your prayers and your acts of charity have gone up as a memorial before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa and summon a man named Simon, who is called [Peter. 6](javascript:%7b%7d) This man is staying as a guest with a man named Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.” 7 When the angel who had spoken to him departed, Cornelius called two of his personal servants and a devout soldier from among those who served him, 8 and when he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa ([Acts 10:1-8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Luke introduces us to a centurion named Cornelius. Luke’s description of Cornelius is similar to that of the centurion Luke has described in [Luke 7:1-10](javascript:%7b%7d). Both are devout, God-fearing men. Both are known for their prayers and for their acts of charity. Cornelius seems to have communicated his faith to those in his household because they appear to share his faith. The vision Cornelius received came at three o’clock in the afternoon, the normal time for Jewish prayers in the afternoon (see [Acts 3:1; 10:30](javascript:%7b%7d)). After his angelic visitation, Cornelius explained everything to his servants and the devout soldier he sent to Peter’s residence.

When the angel appears to Cornelius, it is not because this man lacks faith, but because he (like the centurion in [Luke 7](javascript:%7b%7d)) would not have even considered asking a Jew to his home. Thus, God had to prepare both Cornelius and Peter for this breech of tradition. When the angel appeared, Cornelius responded in a way that revealed his faith: **“What is it Lord?”** (verse 4). I am reminded of Samuel’s response to the divine call in [1 Samuel 3](javascript:%7b%7d): “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” ([1 Samuel 3:10](javascript:%7b%7d)). Cornelius is a most remarkable man.

9 About noon the next day, while they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing the meal, a trance came over him. 11 He saw heaven opened and an object something like a large sheet descending, being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and wild birds. 13 Then a voice said to him, “Get up, Peter; slaughter and eat!” 14 But Peter said, “Certainly not, Lord, for I have never eaten anything defiled and ritually unclean!” 15 The voice spoke to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!” 16 This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into heaven ([Acts 10:9-16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

At just the right moment in time, God spoke to Peter in a vision. This vision, like that of Cornelius, came at a time when the recipient of the vision was in prayer. It was lunch time, and Peter was hungry. I can almost hear Peter say, “I’m hungry enough to eat a horse!” What came next would cause Peter to lose his appetite. The meal was still being prepared and so Peter used this time to pray. In his vision, Peter was instructed to kill and eat various kinds of animal life, some of which would have clearly been unclean according to Jewish food laws. Some of these unclean animals (such as the **“reptiles”**) were also totally unappealing as food.

Peter’s response to the Lord’s instruction in this vision is interesting when compared to the earlier responses of Saul and Cornelius:

Saul: “Who are you Lord?” ([Acts 9:5](javascript:%7b%7d))

Cornelius: “What is it Lord?” ([Acts 10:4](javascript:%7b%7d))

Peter: “Certainly not, Lord!” ([Acts 10:14](javascript:%7b%7d))

The vision is repeated two more times, so it is very clear to Peter that God is revealing something of great importance.[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P58_21702) Peter had no idea at that moment what the dream meant, or how it was to be applied, but that would soon become clear.

### Cornelius’ Messengers Arrive From Caesarea [Acts 10:17-23](javascript:%7b%7d)

17 Now while Peter was puzzling over what the vision he had seen could signify, the men sent by Cornelius had learned where Simon’s house was and approached the gate. 18 They called out to ask if Simon, known as Peter, was staying there as a guest. 19 While Peter was still thinking seriously about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Look! Three men are looking for you. 20 But get up, go down, and accompany them without hesitation, because I have sent them.” 21 So Peter went down to the men and said, “Here I am, the person you’re looking for. Why have you come?” 22 They said, “Cornelius the centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man, well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear a message from you.” 23 So Peter invited them in and entertained them as guests. On the next day he got up and set out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him ([Acts 10:17-23](javascript:%7b%7d)).

You can imagine Peter’s bewilderment as a result of his noontime vision. What did it mean? What was he supposed to do about it? Just then the messengers from Cornelius arrived at the door of Simon the tanner’s home. These men had been told to go to Joppa and find a man named Simon Peter, who was staying at the home of a tanner named Simon, whose house was by the sea. This was not the same as being given an address, which meant that the messengers had to stop and ask for directions[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P62_23543) (something men are not found doing very often). I believe this detail is supplied because it indicates that these Gentile messengers did not arrive secretly. They must have asked directions on more than one occasion, drawing attention to themselves and to their arrival. Add to this the fact that they stood outside Simon’s house, calling out to ask if this was where Simon Peter was staying. This had to attract a good deal of attention and arouse considerable curiosity.

It was at this moment that the Spirit gave Peter some very clear instruction. He informed Peter that three men were looking for him and told him to go downstairs and accompany them without hesitation, because He had sent them. So far as we are told, the Spirit did not mention that these three men were Gentiles, though this would become apparent all too soon. Peter went downstairs and identified himself and then asked the reason for their coming. They told Peter about Cornelius and then repeated the story of how the angel had instructed Cornelius to send for him because he had a message for them.

Peter invited these men into the house where they spent the night (and no doubt were also fed). I cannot help but think that it was a whole lot easier for Peter to invite these men into Simon’s home in Joppa than it would have been to invite these Gentiles into a Jewish home in Jerusalem. The fact that Peter was able to stay with a tanner, an occupation that may well have rendered him unclean, may have indicated that Peter had already become less meticulous about some of the Jewish distinctions between clean and unclean.

### Peter Gets the Message [Acts 10:24-35](javascript:%7b%7d)

24 The following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting anxiously for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 So when Peter came in, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him. 26 But Peter helped him up, saying, “Stand up. I too am a mere mortal.” 27 Peter continued talking with him as he went in, and he found many people gathered together. 28 He said to them, “You know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, yet God has shown me that I should call no person defiled or ritually unclean. 29 Therefore when you sent for me, I came without any objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?” 30 Cornelius replied, “Four days ago at this very hour, at three o’clock in the afternoon, I was praying in my house, and suddenly a man in shining clothing stood before me 31 and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your acts of charity have been remembered before God. 32 Therefore send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter. This man is staying as a guest in the house of Simon the tanner, by the sea.’ 33 Therefore I sent for you at once, and you were kind enough to come. So now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us.” 34 Then Peter started speaking: “I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people, 35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him ([Acts 10:24-35](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When the centurion pled with Jesus to heal his servant ([Luke 7:1-10](javascript:%7b%7d)), Jesus set out on his way to this man’s home. When Jesus was not far from his house, the centurion sent some of his servants to persuade Jesus not to come any further, but simply to heal his servant from a distance. Now why would anyone not want Jesus to be a guest in their home? The centurion knew all too well that Jews did not defile themselves by entering a Gentile home (compare [John 18:28](javascript:%7b%7d)), so he made it easy for Jesus not to come any further. And in so doing, he demonstrated his great faith. He believed that Jesus could heal from a distance, because of His great authority.

Cornelius was well aware of this matter of defilement as well, but he had been divinely instructed to invite Peter to his home. It was thus with a great sense of expectation that Cornelius waited for Peter’s arrival, along with those friends and relatives he had summoned as well. When Peter arrived, Cornelius prostrated himself at the feet of Peter. Most translations indicate that Cornelius **“worshipped”** Peter. I am inclined to agree with the NIV, which says that he **“fell at his feet in reverence.”** I don’t believe that Cornelius worshipped Peter as though he were God. I think he showed reverence for Peter as God’s spokesman, as an apostle.

I do find Peter’s response to this reverential response most informative. Peter refuses to receive worship, and rightly so. When Paul healed the lame man at Lystra, the people attempted to worship him, along with Barnabas. These two apostles fervently sought to put an end to such worship (see [Acts 14:8-18](javascript:%7b%7d)). Herod received worship and seemed to enjoy it, and he died a terrible death as a result ([Acts 12:20-23](javascript:%7b%7d)). Peter made it clear to Cornelius that he was but a mere man, and as such, Cornelius’ act of reverence was not only uncalled for, but inappropriate. Those who would give men too much glory and reverence should listen carefully to the words of Peter.

Going inside the house, Peter discovered that many had gathered in anticipation of his arrival. Peter began by explaining how it was that he was divinely directed to enter this Gentile home, in spite of his predisposition not to do so. Peter’s words are both interesting and significant: 28 *He said to them, “You know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, yet God has shown me that I should call no person defiled or ritually unclean. 29 Therefore when you sent for me, I came without any objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?”* ([Acts 10:28-29](javascript:%7b%7d))

I find it interesting that Peter believes it is unlawful for him to associate with or visit a Gentile (verse 28). As I read these words, I asked myself this question: “Just where does it say in the Old Testament Law that a Jew cannot associate with a Gentile by entering his home?” I then came upon this statement by A. T. Robertson:

But there is no O.T. regulation forbidding such social contact with Gentiles, though the rabbis had added it and had made it binding by custom. There is nothing more binding on the average person than social custom.[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P74_30029)

I am therefore inclined to say that having social contact with a Gentile was not contrary to Old Testament law, but rather was a violation of Jewish tradition. One might be defiled by eating foods that were unclean, but we must remember that our Lord Jesus nullified these food laws:

14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand. 15 There is nothing outside of a person that can defile him by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles him.” 17 Now when Jesus had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 He said to them, “Are you so foolish? Don’t you understand that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him? 19 For it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and then goes out into the sewer.” ( **This means all foods are clean**.) 20 He said, “What comes out of a person defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the human heart, come evil ideas, sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, evil, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and folly. 23 All these evils come from within and defile a person” ([Mark 7:14-23](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Another thing that fascinates me is that Peter is now somehow able to grasp not only the principle, but also its application. I am reminded of the “old Peter” we find in Matthew. In chapter 14, Jesus feeds the 5,000, even though the disciples didn’t see how it was possible. In chapter 15, the disciples (which surely included Peter) could not seem to figure out how God could feed the 4,000, even after the feeding of the 5,000. In chapter 16, Jesus warned of the **“leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees”** ([Matthew 16:6](javascript:%7b%7d)), and all the disciples could think about was literal bread. Only the Canaanite woman understood that bread was a symbol, and she grasped the spiritual meaning of Jesus’ words ([Matthew 15:21-28](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Now, Peter seems able to leap beyond the literal message conveyed in his dream (don’t call food unclean that God has made clean) to the deeper meaning – don’t call people unclean whom God has made clean:

He said to them, “You know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, yet God has shown me that I should call no person defiled or ritually unclean” ([Acts 10:28](javascript:%7b%7d)).

But it went even beyond this. Peter was just now beginning to understand that God does not show partiality among those whom He saves:

34 Then Peter started speaking: “I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people, 35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him ([Acts 10:34-35](javascript:%7b%7d)).

God broke down the old barriers that separated Jews and Gentiles, making one new man, one new entity, the church, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles. This was accomplished through the saving work of Jesus on the cross of Calvary:

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh – who are called “uncircumcision” by the so-called “circumcision” that is performed on the body by human hands – 12 that you were at that time without the Messiah, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who used to be far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, the one who made both groups into one and who destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility, 15 when he nullified in his flesh the law of commandments in decrees. He did this to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace, 16 and to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, 18 so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household, 20 because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit ([Ephesians 2:11-22](javascript:%7b%7d)).

This truth was a mystery, revealed but not understood by Old Testament saints; it was a mystery God chose to unveil through the ministry of Paul and others:

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, 3 that by revelation the divine secret was made known to me, as I wrote before briefly. 4 When reading this, you will be able to understand my insight into this secret of Christ. 5 Now this secret was not disclosed to people in former generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, 6 namely, that through the gospel the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus. 7 I became a servant of this gospel according to the gift of God’s grace that was given to me by the exercise of his power. 8 To me – less than the least of all the saints – this grace was given, to proclaim to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ 9 and to enlighten everyone about God’s secret plan – a secret that has been hidden for ages in God who has created all things. 10 The purpose of this enlightenment is that through the church the multifaceted wisdom of God should now be disclosed to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly realms. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and confident access to God because of Christ’s faithfulness ([Ephesians 3:1-12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Peter now asks why Cornelius has sent for him. Cornelius repeats the story of how he received instructions from an angel to summon Peter. He tells Peter that they now eagerly await the word which he was commanded to bring to them. Peter begins his message by telling them what God has just taught him: God does not show partiality, but He saves both Jews and Gentiles by grace, through faith in the shed blood of Jesus on the cross of Calvary.

### Conclusion

I have chosen to conclude this lesson here, because the focus has been on Peter and Cornelius. In the verses that follow, Peter will proclaim the gospel, Cornelius and those gathered will believe, the Spirit will baptize them, and then Peter’s Jewish colleagues in Jerusalem will object. That is another lesson. But for now, let us conclude by focusing on the lessons that we should learn from our text.

*First, we should observe from our text that it is God who prepares and changes men’s hearts.* In [Acts 9](javascript:%7b%7d), God prepared Saul for conversion in some rather dramatic ways. He also prepared the heart of Ananias for the task He had for him. Objections were divinely overcome; they were not set aside by debate or human efforts. In our text, we see God’s preparation of both Peter (the reluctant believer) and Cornelius. Peter was reluctant to associate with Gentiles, much less to take the gospel to them. God’s preparatory work in Peter’s heart was done just as the messengers sent by Cornelius arrived. Cornelius was reluctant to ask a Jew to enter his house (just as the centurion in [Luke 7:1-10](javascript:%7b%7d) had been), but God prepared him to obey and send for Peter, just as He prepared all in his house to believe the gospel Peter would proclaim.

Our friend, Colin McDougall of Church of the Open Door, has rightly contended that we need to spend much more time in prayer for evangelism, asking God to prepare those for the gospel whom He will send our way. We should ask God to prepare our hearts so that we might perceive open hearts and proclaim Jesus. But we should also ask God to work in the hearts of those to whom we desire to speak. Prepared hearts respond to God’s Word.

Note, too, the perfection of God’s timing in preparing hearts. God’s perfect timing is evident in the conversion of the Ethiopian in chapter 8, of Saul in chapter 9, and of Cornelius and his guests in chapter 10. God’s timing is frequently not ours, but His timing is perfect. When He sets out to do something, He prepares the way for it to happen, and He orchestrates every detail perfectly. Have you questioned God’s timing, or God’s ability to save? If so, I suggest that you meditate on these conversion accounts in Acts.

*Second, we should learn that prayer is a two-way conversation.* The Book of Acts has great lessons for us on the subject of prayer. When men and women pray in Acts, great things happen. What I see in our text is that God speaks to men when they are in prayer. Prayer is not just men and women speaking to God; prayer is God speaking to those who are listening to Him when they pray. In chapter 9, Paul’s vision is apparently associated with Paul’s prayer (see [Acts 9:11-12](javascript:%7b%7d)). In chapter 10, Cornelius was in prayer when God spoke to him about sending for Peter.[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P93_39311) Many of us spend all of our time talking to God, rather than listening for God to speak to us in some way. In my life, this is usually through thoughts that come to my mind. Sometimes it is insight into a passage that I’m thinking about, or praying about. Sometimes it is a thought about how to respond to a difficult situation. I have found that having a pencil and paper nearby is helpful when praying. Prayer is a two-way conversation.

*Third, we should observe that Peter has become a fulfilled Jew.* Consider how the argument of our text develops. First, we read about how God used Peter to heal Aeneas ([Acts 9:32-35](javascript:%7b%7d)), and there is the account of the raising of Dorcas, who had died ([Acts 9:35-43](javascript:%7b%7d)). In these two accounts, we see Peter performing miracles that remind us of miracles Jesus had performed. We even find a similarity in the words Peter employed and those Jesus used. In other words, Peter is acting and talking like Jesus.

Years ago, I was preaching a sermon, and I said the word “God.” As this word came out of my mouth, I realized that I had pronounced it just like one of my heroes, Dr. S. Lewis Johnson. Without even thinking about it, I had imitated Dr. Johnson. That is a compliment to Dr. Johnson. In our text, Peter was beginning to act and to talk like Jesus. This is exactly the way it should be.

It is not until Acts chapter 10, however, that Peter really begins to think like Jesus. Peter and his fellow-apostles had some distorted ideas about the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. He could only think of Gentiles coming to faith by becoming Jews – that is, they could only enter into the blessings of God’s covenant by converting to Judaism as a proselyte. When Jesus commenced His earthly ministry, He made it very clear that He had come to save both Jews and Gentiles:

21 Then he began to tell them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled even as you heard it being read.” 22 All were speaking well of him, and were amazed at the gracious words coming out of his mouth. They said, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” 23 Jesus said to them, “No doubt you will quote to me the proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ and say, ‘What we have heard that you did in Capernaum, do here in your hometown too.’” 24 And he added, “I tell you the truth, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 25 But in truth I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s days, when the sky was shut up three and a half years, and there was a great famine over all the land. 26 Yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to a woman who was a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, yet none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” 28 When they heard this, all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29 They got up, forced him out of the town, and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30 But he passed through the crowd and went on his way ([Luke 4:21-30](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When Jesus healed the centurion’s servant, He marveled at this man’s faith and made it very clear that many like Cornelius would enter into the kingdom of heaven, while many Jews would not:

10 When Jesus heard this he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “I tell you the truth, I have not found such faith in anyone in Israel! 11 I tell you, many will come from the east and west to share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go; just as you believed, it will be done for you.” And the servant was healed at that hour ([Matthew 8:10-13](javascript:%7b%7d)).

It is not until Peter’s vision and his encounter with Cornelius that this apostle finally began to grasp what God had purposed from eternity to accomplish through the church. The Abrahamic Covenant had been distorted and abused by many of the Jews for centuries. Listen, once again, to what God promised Abram:

1 Now the Lord said to Abram,   
“Go forth from your country,   
And from your relatives   
And from your father’s house,   
To the land which I will show you;   
2 And I will make you a great nation,   
And I will bless you,   
And make your name great;   
And so you shall be a blessing;   
3 And I will bless those who bless you,   
And the one who curses you I will curse.   
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” ([Genesis 12:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB).

Abraham and his sons were not only to receive God’s blessing; they were to become a source of blessing to the world. Those who blessed him would be blessed; those who cursed him God would curse. Abraham’s seed would become a blessing to the world. His **“seed,”** according to Paul was the Lord Jesus, Israel’s Messiah:

15 Brothers and sisters, I offer an example from everyday life: When a covenant has been ratified, even though it is only a human contract, no one can set it aside or add anything to it. 16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his descendant. Scripture does not say, “and to the descendants,” referring to many, but “and to your descendant,” referring to one, who is Christ ([Galatians 3:15-16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

God’s promised blessings came through Abraham’s **“seed,”** the Lord Jesus. Those who bless Him (believe in His sacrificial death on the cross of Calvary) will be blessed; those who curse Him (by rejecting His saving work at Calvary) will be cursed.

Being a son of Abraham is not about one’s physical ancestry; it is about one’s relationship to Jesus, the Messiah, by faith:

6 It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all those who are descended from Israel are truly Israel, 7 nor are all the children Abraham’s true descendants; rather “through Isaac will your descendants be counted.” 8 This means it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God; rather, the children of promise are counted as descendants. 9 For this is what the promise declared: “About a year from now I will return and Sarah will have a son” ([Romans 9:6-9](javascript:%7b%7d)).

14 For if they become heirs by the law, faith is empty and the promise is nullified. 15 For the law brings wrath, because where there is no law there is no transgression either. 16 For this reason it is by faith so that it may be by grace, with the result that the promise may be certain to all the descendants – not only to those who are under the law, but also to those who have the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all 17 (as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”). He is our father in the presence of God whom he believed – the God who makes the dead alive and summons the things that do not yet exist as though they already do ([Romans 4:14-17](javascript:%7b%7d)).

As I understand the Scriptures, a **“fulfilled Jew”** is not merely a Jew who has come to trust in Jesus at the Messiah; a **“fulfilled Jew”** is a Jew who has trusted in Jesus as the Promised Messiah, and who is now sharing the good news with Jews and Gentiles alike. God would not allow Peter and his Jewish colleagues to restrict the gospel to Jews alone. Thanks to Cornelius, Peter became a completed Jew. Praise God.

Let me quickly add that Gentiles are “fulfilled” in a similar way. They are fulfilled by being fruitful. They not only accept the gospel for themselves, but they seek to share it with all who are lost, Jews and Gentiles alike.

If salvation is not by works, but is rather a result of God’s grace, received by faith alone, then no one gets to heaven based upon their race, or upon their worthiness. Everyone who gets to heaven gets there by God’s grace. Thus, God does not show favoritism to Jews. He saves Jews and Gentiles alike, by faith. Therefore Peter has no grounds for considering Gentiles to be unclean and unworthy of salvation because all men, Jew or Gentile, are sinful and unworthy, and thus all those who are saved are saved by grace, apart from any merit of their own:

9 What then? Are we better off? Certainly not, for we have already charged that Jews and Greeks alike are all under sin, 10 just as it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one, 11 there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, not even one.” 13 “Their throats are open graves, they deceive with their tongues, the poison of asps is under their lips.” 14 “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” 15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood, 16 ruin and misery are in their paths, 17 and the way of peace they have not known.” 18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” 19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For no one is declared righteous before him by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. 21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (which is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed – 22 namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. 24 But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. 25 God publicly displayed him at his death as the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed. 26 This was also to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, so that he would be just and the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus’ faithfulness. 27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded! By what principle? Of works? No, but by the principle of faith! 28 For we consider that a person is declared righteous by faith apart from the works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles too? Yes, of the Gentiles too! 30 Since God is one, he will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith ([Romans 3:9-30](javascript:%7b%7d)).

What Peter does in our text in the Book of Acts is a watershed event. Its importance can hardly be overemphasized. It opens the door to a whole new era – one might even say a whole new dispensation. Remember our Lord’s response to Peter’s great confession:

15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven! 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven” ([Matthew 16:15-19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Our Lord’s response to Peter’s great confession was a promise to give Peter **“the keys of the kingdom of heaven”** ([Matthew 16:19](javascript:%7b%7d)). Scholars are not entirely agreed as to what this means, but many contend that this is perhaps Peter’s most important use of the **“keys”** our Lord promised him. In [Acts 2](javascript:%7b%7d), it was Peter who declared that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Peter held his Jewish audience responsible for the death of Jesus and declared that Jesus had risen from the dead. Peter proclaimed that Jesus was the promised Messiah and that all who believed in Him would be saved. Thus, Peter “opened the door” for the Jews who had rejected Jesus. Next, Peter opened the door for the Samaritans who had trusted in Jesus as their Messiah ([Acts 8:14-25](javascript:%7b%7d)). Now, at last, Peter has opened the door of salvation for Gentiles who believe in Jesus. Gentiles no longer need to become Jewish proselytes to enjoy fellowship with God, or with their Jewish fellow believers.

And so I will end with this question, “Have you received the gift of salvation by faith in Jesus that God has offered to Jews and Gentiles alike, without favoritism or partiality?” This is a great truth, but it will do you no good unless you have received God’s offer of salvation by trusting in His death, burial, and resurrection.

[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P17_5863)

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the NET Bible. The NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION, also known as THE NET BIBLE, is a completely new translation of the Bible, not a revision or an update of a previous English version. It was completed by more than twenty biblical scholars who worked directly from the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. The translation project originally started as an attempt to provide an electronic version of a modern translation for electronic distribution over the Internet and on CD (compact disk). Anyone anywhere in the world with an Internet connection will be able to use and print out the NET Bible without cost for personal study. In addition, anyone who wants to share the Bible with others can print unlimited copies and give them away free to others. It is available on the Internet at: [www.netbible.org](http://www.netbible.org).

[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P19_6766) Copyright © 2006 by Community Bible Chapel, 418 E. Main Street, Richardson, TX 75081. This is the edited manuscript of Lesson 15 in the *Studies in the Book of Acts* series prepared by Robert L. Deffinbaugh on February 26, 2006. Anyone is at liberty to use this lesson for educational purposes only, with or without credit. The Chapel believes the material presented herein to be true to the teaching of Scripture, and desires to further, not restrict, its potential use as an aid in the study of God’s Word. The publication of this material is a grace ministry of Community Bible Chapel.

[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P29_12275) Caesarea is north and west of the city of Jerusalem, on the Mediterranean coast. Joppa is approximately 35 miles south of Caesarea, still on the Mediterranean coast. Lydda is inland, about 11 miles southeast of Joppa.

[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P32_13166) See also [Matthew 9:2-8](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 2:3-12](javascript:%7b%7d).

[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P42_16454) See also [Matthew 9:18-26](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 8:49-56](javascript:%7b%7d).

[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P58_21703) I am reminded of Pharaoh’s two-fold dream and Joseph’s grasp of what this repetition meant: “The dream was repeated to Pharaoh because the matter has been decreed by God, and God will make it happen soon” ([Genesis 41:32](javascript:%7b%7d)).

[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P62_23544) Our text indicates the messengers “**had learned where Simon’s house was . . .”** (verse 17). I prefer the NASB rendering: “**. . . the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon’s house. . . .”**

[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P74_30030) A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931). Electronic version, as part of BibleWorks.

[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/15-perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048" \l "P93_39312) We know that Cornelius was a man of prayer ([Acts 10:4, 31](javascript:%7b%7d)). We also know that his vision of the angel took place at three o’clock in the afternoon ([Acts 10:3](javascript:%7b%7d)). This was the normal afternoon time of prayer ([Acts 3:1](javascript:%7b%7d)).

# Gentile Faith; Jewish Fears (Acts 10:36-11:30)

Deffinbaugh at

### Introduction[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P14_6430)

I have a friend who grew up in jail. This was not because he was a criminal, but because his father was the county sheriff for many years. The sheriff was in charge of the jail, and his family lived in the building where the jail was located. When my friend’s father died, I went to the funeral service. At the service, we met a man who had been confined to a wheelchair for some time. He shared a story about my friend’s father that illustrates our text in the Book of Acts.

It was the time of the county fair, and this handicapped fellow decided he wanted to attend. Upon his arrival, he went to the ticket booth to purchase his ticket. With ticket in hand, he made his way to the gate. The problem was that the gate was not wide enough for his wheelchair to pass through. The person at the gate seemed unsympathetic and unwilling to help. It was at this very moment that the sheriff arrived on the scene. He sized up the situation and with a mighty kick, knocked down the gate and helped the man through.

In [Acts 1](javascript:%7b%7d), our Lord gave this “Great Commission” to His disciples:

7 He told them, “You are not permitted to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth” ([Acts 1:7-8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The apostles were instructed to wait until the Spirit came upon them, empowering them to carry out the Great Commission.[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P20_8531) The Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, as described in [Acts 2](javascript:%7b%7d). The result was that Peter preached a powerful sermon which God used to save many. In the Spirit’s power, the apostles performed miracles, which provided more opportunities to proclaim the gospel (see [Acts 3](javascript:%7b%7d)). But as the apostles continued to heal and to preach in the name of Jesus, the Sadducees and other Jewish religious leaders became increasingly concerned, so that they began to persecute the apostles (see [Acts 4:1-31; 5:12-42](javascript:%7b%7d)). The powerful preaching of Stephen was answered by his stoning (see [Acts 6-7](javascript:%7b%7d)). This resulted in a great persecution that scattered the Jerusalem church abroad:

And Saul agreed completely with killing him. Now on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were forced to scatter throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria ([Acts 8:1](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The gospel was advancing in a way that partially fulfilled the Great Commission given in [Acts 1:8](javascript:%7b%7d), but this was far less than what our Lord had commanded. For one thing, the gospel was spread only as far as **“all Judea and Samaria”** ([Acts 8:1; 9:31](javascript:%7b%7d)).[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P23_9687) For another, the apostles had not yet come to terms with the fact that the gospel was the good news of salvation for Jews *and Gentiles*, without distinction. Up to this point in time, it was assumed that in order to be a Christian, one must either be Jewish, either by birth or by becoming a Jewish proselyte. The failure of the apostles to aggressively fulfill the Great Commission seems to have been fueled, to some degree, by their belief that the gospel should not go to the Gentiles. There were a few exceptions – God fearers – like the centurion in [Luke 7:2-10](javascript:%7b%7d), the Ethiopian eunuch, and Cornelius, but these all appear to be people of influence and means, who employed their resources in the service of Judaism.[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P24_10596)

There were certain excuses for the apostles’ inaction which could have been used. For example, we know from our text that they believed the Gentiles should not be evangelized as Gentiles because they were considered unclean,or because of the Jewish food laws. Also, someone might turn to those instances where our Lord seems to forbid His disciples to take the gospel to the Gentiles, or to the Samaritans (see [Matthew 10:5-6](javascript:%7b%7d)). But one must also explain why Jesus made it clear from the outset of His ministry that He had come to save Gentiles (see [Luke 4:16-30](javascript:%7b%7d)). And one must explain how Jesus Himself went into Gentile territory with the gospel ([John 4:3-42](javascript:%7b%7d); [Matthew 15:21-39](javascript:%7b%7d)). More than this, one must explain the words of Jesus to the centurion, by which He indicated that believing Gentiles will enter the kingdom while many Jews will not:

5 When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him asking for help: 6 “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible anguish.” 7 Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him.” 8 But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Instead, just say the word and my servant will be healed. 9 For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to this one, ‘Go’ and he goes, and to another ‘Come’ and he comes, and to my slave ‘Do this’ and he does it.” 10 When Jesus heard this he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “ **I tell you the truth, I have not found such faith in anyone in Israel! 11 I tell you, many will come from the east and west to share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**” 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go; just as you believed, it will be done for you.” And the servant was healed at that hour ([Matthew 8:5-13](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

In addition to this, one must explain why the Great Commission ([Matthew 28:18-20](javascript:%7b%7d); [Acts 1:7-8](javascript:%7b%7d)) clearly included going to the Gentiles. There was a major theological roadblock to the evangelization of Gentiles which had to be removed before the Great Commission could be fulfilled. In Acts, God has already dealt with Peter on this matter in chapter 10, and now through Peter, God will open the door to worldwide evangelism. Our text is foundational to the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of the church, and to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The truth that is unveiled here will become the bedrock foundation for much of the teaching we find in the New Testament. We must therefore listen carefully to what God has for His people to learn.

### The Gospel, Short and Simple [Acts 10:34-43](javascript:%7b%7d)

34 Then Peter started speaking: “I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people, 35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him. 36 You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all) – 37 you know what happened throughout Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John announced: 38 with respect to Jesus from Nazareth, that God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him. 39 We are witnesses of all the things he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him up on the third day and caused him to be seen, 41 not by all the people, but by us, the witnesses God had already chosen, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to warn them that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. 43 About him all the prophets testify, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” ([Acts 10:34-43](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Luke is preparing the reader for the next stage in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. In the first part of chapter 9, he records the dramatic conversion of Saul. Saul, soon to be known as Paul,[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P31_14797) will play a crucial role in the evangelization of the Gentiles. Another crucial role will be played by Peter. Peter was the one to whom the **“keys to the kingdom”** were given by our Lord ([Matthew 16:19](javascript:%7b%7d)). He must first be convinced that God has purposed the gospel to save Gentiles as well as Jews. We dealt with this in our last lesson ([Acts 9:32](javascript:%7b%7d)—10:35). Now we shall see how God used Peter and his visit to the home of Cornelius to convince his fellow apostles and others that the gospel is for Jews and Gentiles alike, without distinction.

After hearing how God had directed Cornelius to send for him (10:30-33), Peter shared what God had just taught him:

34 Then Peter started speaking: “I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people, 35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him” ([Acts 10:34-35](javascript:%7b%7d)).[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P34_15698)

Being Jewish did not give the Jewish people a “leg up” when it came to salvation. Not all Jews were destined to salvation ([Romans 9:6-8](javascript:%7b%7d)). While the Jews were privileged in many ways,[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P36_16050) they were not predisposed to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The law condemned Jews, just as it did Gentiles ([Acts 15:10-11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Romans 3:9-20](javascript:%7b%7d)). The Jews did fall under greater condemnation because of their greater knowledge ([Romans 2](javascript:%7b%7d)), and they were likewise judicially blinded ([Romans 11:25](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [2 Corinthians 3:12](javascript:%7b%7d)—4:4).

The gospel was not for Jews only. From the very beginning, God had purposed to save men from every race, tribe, and tongue:

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And **I will bless those who bless you**, And the one who curses you I will curse. **And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed**” ([Genesis 12:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB, emphasis mine).

9 And thus the Gentiles glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,   
“Because of this I will confess you among the Gentiles,   
and I will sing praises to your name.”

10 And again it says:   
“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”

11 And again,   
“Praise the Lord all you Gentiles,   
and let all the peoples praise him.”

12 And again Isaiah says,   
“The root of Jesse will come,   
and the one who rises to rule over the Gentiles,   
in him will the Gentiles hope” ([Romans 15:9-12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

9 They were singing a new song:   
“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were killed, and at the cost of your own blood you have purchased for God persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation. 10 You have appointed them as a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” ([Revelation 5:9-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

9 After these things I looked, and here was an enormous crowd that no one could count, made up of persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb dressed in long white robes, and with palm branches in their hands. 10 They were shouting out in a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God, to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ([Revelation 7:9-10](javascript:%7b%7d))

6 Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, and he had an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe, language, and people. 7 He declared in a loud voice: “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has arrived, and worship the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water!” ([Revelation 14:6-7](javascript:%7b%7d))

When we come to [Acts 10:36-43](javascript:%7b%7d), we find one of the most concise summations of the gospel in the Bible. It is almost as though Luke has provided us with a summary of the contents of one of the New Testament Gospels. Take note of the following elements:

1. The gospel began with the preaching of John the Baptist ([Acts 10:37](javascript:%7b%7d)).

2. The baptism of Jesus, when He was divinely designated as Messiah and empowered with the Holy Spirit ([Acts 10:38](javascript:%7b%7d)).

3. In His earthly ministry Jesus did good, healed the sick, and delivered those held captive by the devil ([Acts 10:38](javascript:%7b%7d)).

4. Jesus was crucified by those who rejected Him ([Acts 10:39](javascript:%7b%7d)).

5. The resurrection of Jesus was evidenced by His appearances to many, and to the apostles in particular (who were appointed to testify to His resurrection) ([Acts 10:40-41](javascript:%7b%7d)).

6. Jesus then gave His witnesses the Great Commission ([Acts 10:42](javascript:%7b%7d)).

7. Jesus is Lord of all ([Acts 10:36](javascript:%7b%7d)).

8. The Lord Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead ([Acts 10:42](javascript:%7b%7d)).

9. Everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus receives the forgiveness of their sins ([Acts 10:43](javascript:%7b%7d)).

10. This salvation is available to men of every nation, without distinction ([Acts 10:34-35](javascript:%7b%7d), 43).

11. This gospel is the fulfillment of the message of all the Old Testament prophets ([Acts 10](javascript:%7b%7d): 43).

### Salvation and the Witness of the Spirit [Acts 10:44-48](javascript:%7b%7d)

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were greatly astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, 46 for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, 47 “No one can withhold the water for these people to be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” 48 So he gave orders to have them baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for several days ([Acts 10:44-48](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Peter had not said all he intended, but obviously he had said enough. He was just warming up when the Spirit fell on all those who had gathered to hear him speak. It goes without saying that their hearts had been prepared because they immediately grasped the good news. (My assumption is that as Old Testament saints – God fearers – they already knew and believed[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P61_20841) most of what Peter told them.) What they really needed to hear was not only that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but that faith in Him would bring the forgiveness of sins, whether for the Jew or for the Gentile.

The divine witness to the salvation of these Gentiles came as the Spirit fell on all of them.[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P63_21187) The circumcised believers who accompanied Peter from Joppa were astounded **“that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out *even on the Gentiles*”** ([Acts 10:45](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine). They were speaking in tongues and praising God, just as men were when the Spirit came at Pentecost (see [Acts 2:4, 11](javascript:%7b%7d)). Peter really had no other choice than to order that these saints be baptized.

We are told that these saints asked Peter to stay on for several days, and it seems quite clear that this is what he did. I think this means several things. First, it seems to have given some time to return to Jerusalem ahead of Peter and to report these events to his staunch Jewish brethren (see [Acts 11:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d)). Second, it meant that Peter had to have stayed in this Gentile home and eaten Gentile food. It would have been one thing for Peter to have preached and then to have left immediately; he preached and stayed on, not unlike our Lord did in that Samaritan town ([John 4:39-43](javascript:%7b%7d)).

### Showdown in Jerusalem: From Protest to Praise [Acts 11:1-18](javascript:%7b%7d)

1 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles too had accepted the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers took issue with him, 3 saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and shared a meal with them.” 4 But Peter began and explained it to them point by point, saying, 5 “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, an object something like a large sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came to me. 6 As I stared I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild animals, reptiles, and wild birds. 7 I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; slaughter and eat!’ 8 But I said, ‘Certainly not, Lord, for nothing defiled or ritually unclean has ever entered my mouth!’ 9 But the voice replied a second time from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!’ 10 This happened three times, and then everything was pulled up to heaven again. 11 At that very moment, three men sent to me from Caesarea approached the house where we were staying. 12 The Spirit told me to accompany them without hesitation. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. 13 He informed us how he had seen an angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter, 14 who will speak a message to you by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ 15 Then as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as he did on us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, as he used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 17 Therefore if God gave them the same gift as he also gave us after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to hinder God?” 18 When they heard this, they ceased their objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted the repentance that leads to life even to the Gentiles” ([Acts 11:1-18](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Word of what had happened in Caesarea quickly reached the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem,[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P68_24691) even before Peter himself had returned. It is obvious that his Jewish brethren were distressed with what they had heard. The accusation they made against Peter is interesting:

“You went to uncircumcised men and shared a meal with them” ([Acts 11:3](javascript:%7b%7d)).

They faulted Peter for having eaten with men who were uncircumcised. Had those who had gathered in the home of Cornelius been Jewish proselytes, rather than mere “God fearers,” they would not have had grounds for objection. They don’t challenge Peter for preaching the gospel to Gentiles. They don’t question why he did not circumcise these believers. They don’t object to the fact that he had them baptized. But in my opinion, these things are really not what they objected to. They really objected to him preaching the gospel to Gentiles and to his accepting them as **“clean.”** Notice the conclusion these “concerned brethren” reached after Peter explained what happened:

“So then, God has granted the repentance that leads to life even to the Gentiles” ([Acts 11:18](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The real issue then was the evangelization of Gentiles, as Gentiles, without first requiring them to embrace Judaism by becoming Jewish proselytes.

Peter wisely and patiently retold the entire story to his Jewish brethren from the beginning. He started with his vision and reported how the Spirit had directed him to accompany the messengers Cornelius sent to bring him to Caesarea. God was in this from beginning to end. How could Peter do anything else? He clinches his defense by focusing on the baptism of the Spirit which he and his Jewish companions witnessed:

16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, as he used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 17 Therefore if God gave them the same gift as he also gave us after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to hinder God?” ([Acts 11:16-17](javascript:%7b%7d))

How does this make a compelling concluding argument? There are at least two forceful points contained in Peter’s argument. *First, Peter asserts to his Jewish brethren that what happened to Cornelius and his associates was precisely the same thing that happened to them at Pentecost.* These Gentiles received the gift of the Spirit in exactly the same way the Spirit fell on those who had gathered at Pentecost. My sense is that many of those who challenged Peter were present at the first Pentecost. One must conclude, then, that God did not distinguish between the first Jewish believers at Pentecost and these Gentile believers in Caesarea. How can one prohibit what God has produced? How can one view Gentiles as outsiders when God has placed His seal upon them?

*Second, Peter argues from the words of the Lord Jesus:*

“And I remembered the word of the Lord, as **he used to say**, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” ([Acts 11:16](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

We know our Lord spoke these words to His apostles in [Acts 1:5](javascript:%7b%7d), but Peter’s wording implies that Jesus made this statement at other times as well. How do these words justify Peter’s actions? Jesus promised that the Spirit would baptize them in the near future. This happened to Jewish believers at Pentecost. Now it has happened again, to Gentile believers in Caesarea. But more than this, our Lord’s words indicated a relationship between John’s baptism with water and the subsequent baptism of the Spirit.[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P79_28287)

I believe Peter’s logic works something like this. The Lord Jesus regarded John’s baptism as important (remember that our Lord’s disciples baptized as well – [John 4:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d)), but He also indicated, as did John,[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P81_28548) that there was to be a greater baptism than this, a baptism of the Spirit. The normal sequence at that point in time had been water baptism, then Spirit baptism.[14](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P82_28763) If Spirit baptism followed water baptism in Acts, and if Spirit baptism was greater than water baptism, then how could the former (water baptism) be denied when the latter (Spirit baptism) had already occurred? How could Peter say “No!” to water baptism when God had already said “Yes!” to Spirit baptism? Peter’s actions were in response to what God had said and done. No one could condemn Peter for acting consistently with God.

Just as Peter had no choice but to baptize these believing Gentiles, the circumcised believers who had initially objected to Peter’s actions now had no choice but to change their minds as well.

When they heard this, they ceased their objections and praised God, saying, “**So then, God has granted the repentance that leads to life even to the Gentiles**” ([Acts 11:18](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

For some reason, it had never occurred to these circumcised saints that God had purposed to save Gentiles as Gentiles, without having first become a Jewish proselyte. To us, this seems like a minor point. To these Jewish saints, it was a complete paradigm shift which turned their theology and practice upside-down. To the New Testament epistles and to us, this revelation is a foundational truth concerning the church.

I have struggled with this passage previously because I could not understand why Luke did not make more of [Mark 7](javascript:%7b%7d):

14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand. 15 There is nothing outside of a person that can defile him by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles him.” 17 Now when Jesus had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 He said to them, “Are you so foolish? Don’t you understand that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him? 19 For it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and then goes out into the sewer.” ( **This means all foods are clean**.) 20 He said, “What comes out of a person defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the human heart, come evil ideas, sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, evil, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and folly. 23 All these evils come from within and defile a person” ([Mark 7:14-23](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Why did Peter and Luke leap from his thrice-repeated vision about clean and unclean animals (food) to accepting Gentiles as fellow saints? I now see that I was reasoning in the wrong direction. I was reasoning that because Jesus had declared all foods clean, Peter was now free to preach the gospel to Gentiles. But the reasoning is really the reverse. Gentiles are clean, not because of what they eat, but because of the saving work of Jesus Christ on their behalf, a work they have embraced by faith. In [Mark 7](javascript:%7b%7d), Jesus taught that it was not food that defiles men; what defiles us is what comes out of us (wicked thoughts, words, deeds), not what goes into us (food). The reason fellowship with Gentiles is allowed (including eating their food) is because God has saved them; God has given them clean hearts. Because He has made believing Gentiles clean, we can fellowship with them as peers. It is not about external things like food, but about internal things like a changed heart. God made Gentiles clean by saving them, and thus neither Peter nor any Jewish saint should dare to call them unclean by refusing fellowship with them.

### The Church at Antioch [Acts 11:19-30](javascript:%7b%7d)

19 Now those who had been scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one but Jews. 20 But there were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene among them who came to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks too, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus. 21 The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 A report about them came to the attention of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts, 24 because he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a significant number of people were brought to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught a significant number of people. Now it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.

27 At that time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, got up and predicted by the Spirit that a severe famine was about to come over the whole inhabited world. (This took place during the reign of Claudius.) 29 So the disciples, each in accordance with his financial ability, decided to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. 30 They did so, sending their financial aid to the elders by Barnabas and Saul ([Acts 11:19-30](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When we come to [Acts 11:19](javascript:%7b%7d) we find several significant changes:

*(1) We have a change in personnel.* Luke changes from Peter and his fellow Hebraic Jews to Barnabas and Saul, who are Hellenistic Jews.

*(2) We have a change in time*. At [Acts 11:19](javascript:%7b%7d), we are taken back to the time frame of [Acts 8:1](javascript:%7b%7d) – Stephen’s death, the resulting persecution of the church, and the scattering of the saints.

*(3) We have a change in place.* We move from Jerusalem to Antioch.

I must confess that because of these changes, I have agonized about verses 19-30. I couldn’t decide whether to include them with this lesson, and thus to keep them with chapter 11, or whether to include them in the next lesson, with chapter 12. So how do these changes justify dealing with [Acts 11:19-30](javascript:%7b%7d) as a part of the previous context? I think I’m beginning to understand the flow of Luke’s argument here. See if you agree.

More than the change in place or personnel, I was troubled by the change in time that occurs at [Acts 11:19](javascript:%7b%7d). Why go back to the time frame of [Acts 8:1](javascript:%7b%7d)? I believe it is because Luke wants us to see that God is orchestrating a most important event by achieving two things simultaneously. We have observed simultaneous action already, beginning at [Acts 8:1](javascript:%7b%7d). While God was preparing the Ethiopian eunuch for salvation, He was also guiding Philip to their meeting place in the desert ([Acts 8:26-40](javascript:%7b%7d)). While God was preparing Saul for conversion, He was preparing Ananias for meeting with Saul to restore his sight ([Acts 9:1-19](javascript:%7b%7d)). While God was preparing Cornelius for the arrival of Peter, He was also preparing Peter to go to the home of a Gentile ([Acts 10:1-33](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The same thing is happening in our text. While God is preparing the Jerusalem church to acknowledge the inclusion of Gentile believers into the church – thus paving the way for the fulfillment of the Great Commission ([Acts 11:1-18](javascript:%7b%7d)) – He is also beginning to evangelize Gentiles in Antioch ([Acts 11:19](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.). Thus, the stoning of Stephen brought about the persecution and the scattering of the Jerusalem church, resulting in: (a) the conversion of Jews and Samaritans[15](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P99_35871) ([Acts 8:1-25](javascript:%7b%7d)); and, (b) the salvation of Gentiles like the Ethiopian eunuch ([Acts 8:26-40](javascript:%7b%7d)), those in the household of Cornelius, and those in Antioch ([Acts 10:1](javascript:%7b%7d)—11:30).

While the Jews in Jerusalem were debating the legitimacy of the salvation of Gentiles ([Acts 11:1-18](javascript:%7b%7d)), God was already at work saving Gentiles. I think that it was very shortly after the decision of [Acts 11:18](javascript:%7b%7d) was reached that God brought the news of the church in Antioch to the church in Jerusalem. This is the reason for the sequence of events as we find them in Luke’s account. What the Jerusalem church leaders (including the apostles) had decided in principle ([Acts 11:18](javascript:%7b%7d)), they now had to act upon in practice – by sending Barnabas to Antioch ([Acts 11:20](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.).

God did not require the Hebraic Jerusalem Jews (the apostles and others) to lead the charge in evangelizing to the **“uttermost part”** of the earth. As the Scripture says, **“. . . he knows what we are made of; he realizes we are made of clay”** ([Psalm 103:14](javascript:%7b%7d)). Instead, God raised up Hellenistic Jews like Stephen and Philip ([Acts 6-8](javascript:%7b%7d)) and Saul ([Acts 9](javascript:%7b%7d)) to carry the torch of Gentile evangelism. But it was important – indeed it was necessary – for the apostles and the Jerusalem Hebraic Jews to acknowledge this truth so fundamental to the life and function of the church: In Christ God has brought together in one body, the church, both Jews and Gentiles, without partiality. Jews and Gentiles are equal members in the body of Christ.

26 For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female – for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise ([Galatians 3:26-29](javascript:%7b%7d)).

[Acts 11:19-26](javascript:%7b%7d) is a wonderful account about this magnificent man, Barnabas, who was indeed **“a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith”** ([Acts 11:24](javascript:%7b%7d)). He not only acknowledged the salvation of these Gentiles, he delighted in it ([Acts 11:23](javascript:%7b%7d)). And he wisely sought out Saul to come and minister to this new church ([Acts 11:25-26](javascript:%7b%7d)). Surely this is the beginning of a wonderful partnership of Barnabas and Paul in the gospel that will blossom in the near future ([Acts 13:1](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.). Above and beyond all of this, we see that God has begun to evangelize the Gentiles, and that this Gentile evangelization has been sanctioned by the Hebraic Jerusalem Jews, including, in particular, the apostles. This is a monumental precedent in the history of the church.

The closing verses of [Acts 11](javascript:%7b%7d) – verses 27-30 – are significant in several ways. *First, this passage once again demonstrates that when someone becomes a saint, their wallet is likewise sanctified.* One finds it difficult to ignore Luke’s emphasis on financial generosity as a result of coming to faith in Jesus. We find this stated in [Acts 2:44-45](javascript:%7b%7d); in [Acts 4:34-37](javascript:%7b%7d); and again (somewhat less directly) in [Acts 6:1-6](javascript:%7b%7d). Now, in [Acts 11:27-30](javascript:%7b%7d), we find the newly-saved saints in Corinth sharing their financial resources with the needy Jewish saints in Judea and Jerusalem. Loving God is accompanied by a love for others ([Matthew 22:34-40](javascript:%7b%7d); [Romans 13:8-10](javascript:%7b%7d)). And our love flows from God’s love for us ([1 John 4:19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Second, we find that the generosity of the saints in Antioch is practiced even before the actual crisis has come.* Prophets, including Agabus, arrived in Antioch with the revelation that a famine was coming to the whole world. The saints were told there would be a famine in the near future. (It wouldn’t require a prophet to inform you of an existing famine.) The saints at Antioch began to set money aside before the crisis had even come, so that funds would be on hand when they were needed. This is anticipatory generosity. The point is that these new Gentile believers were eager to give to their Jewish brethren.

*Third, these verses demonstrate that accepting Gentiles as fellow believers was not a decision that put the Jews at a disadvantage, but one that resulted in blessing for the Jewish saints*. For some, accepting Gentile evangelism probably came hard (see [Acts 15:1](javascript:%7b%7d)). Was accepting the Gentiles as fellow believers a burden that Jewish saints must begrudgingly bear? As Paul would say, **“God forbid!”**[16](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P107_40274) Shortly after the church in Antioch was born, they began to demonstrate their unity with their Jewish brethren by sharing with them in their time of need. Embracing Gentile saints was a blessing to the Jews, and not a curse.

### Conclusion

When I was in college, I majored in political science. One of my courses was Constitutional Law. In this course, I learned about some Supreme Court decisions which were landmark rulings that set a precedent of great magnitude. The conversion of Cornelius and those gathered with him resulted in a decision by the Jerusalem church leaders which set the course for the church and the rest of the New Testament. It removed a significant theological roadblock to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The gospel was intended for both Jews and Gentiles, without distinction. The New Testament writers – Paul in particular – will herald and expound this theme:

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh – who are called “uncircumcision” by the so-called “circumcision” that is performed on the body by human hands – 12 that you were at that time without the Messiah, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who used to be far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, the one who made both groups into one and who destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility, 15 when he nullified in his flesh the law of commandments in decrees. He did this to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace, 16 and to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, 18 so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household, 20 because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit ([Ephesians 2:11-22](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Let us conclude by considering some of the implications and applications of this text for Christians today.

*(1) This is the gospel, by which all men can be saved.*I don’t know of any text that summarizes the gospel more concisely than Peter’s words, spoken to Cornelius and those with him. This is the gospel in a nutshell. Our Lord came to this earth, was baptized by John and by the Holy Spirit. In this way, He was designated as God’s Messiah and was empowered to carry out His earthly ministry. Jesus did many miracles, setting Himself apart from all others. He was the Messiah, but He was rejected and crucified by those He came to save. God overruled this by raising Jesus from the dead. He provided convincing proof of this resurrection by many appearances to those appointed as witnesses. The apostles were witnesses of the resurrection, appointed to proclaim the gospel to all who would believe, Jew or Gentile. Jesus will come again to judge those who have rejected Him. He is Lord of all. Have you trusted in Jesus?

*(2) There is but one gospel, by which Jews and Gentiles alike must be saved.*There are some today who would suggest that while Jesus may be “a way,” He is not **“the way.”** The Bible teaches that Jesus is the only way to heaven: *Jesus replied, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” ([John 14:6](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be saved”* ([Acts 4:12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Jews and Gentiles alike can find the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of heaven only through faith in Jesus.

*(3) The gospel is only for those who are unclean and completely unworthy of it.* One of the reasons why we are disobedient to the Great Commission is that we do not wish to preach the gospel to those we deem unworthy of it. Earlier in our service today, one of our missionaries told us that some of the tribes where he serves questioned the wisdom of going to this one particular tribe with the gospel. What was worse, some fellow missionaries even questioned going to this tribe. We all have people whom we deem unworthy of the gospel, or unsavable. Our text should remind us that the gospel is only for those who are unworthy of salvation and who cannot make themselves acceptable in God’s sight. May I ask you to consider those whom you may have deemed unworthy of the gospel? *God wants to teach us that all men are unworthy of the gospel, but that the gospel is for all men.* *That is because the gospel is the good news that salvation is a gift, given by grace through faith in Jesus.*

*(4) Salvation is of the Lord.* It wasn’t Peter who took the initiative to bring the gospel to Cornelius and his household; it was God. God prepared Peter and those who would hear his message. It wasn’t Peter who persuaded Cornelius and friends to believe; God did. They came to faith apart from an invitation. And it wasn’t Peter who baptized them in the Spirit. Peter was an instrument in the hands of the Redeemer, but he wasn’t the cause of these conversions.

We live at a time when people are obsessed with methods. They wish to know the methods of those who are successful. This is not altogether a bad thing. But let us take note that the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul, and Cornelius were not saved because of some slick evangelistic approach. They were saved because God prepared their hearts and drew them to Himself by faith. More important than having the right method is preserving and proclaiming the right message. Many are seeking to modify the message of the gospel to make it more palatable. Our task is to proclaim the gospel that God has given us in His Word, the gospel that Peter and Paul have proclaimed in the Book of Acts. If salvation is **“of the Lord”** – and it surely is – then let us spend more time in His Word and in prayer, asking God to prepare the hearts of lost people and to draw them to faith.

*(5) I am amazed at the faith of men like Cornelius.* How quickly and eagerly he embraces the gospel. Here is a man who must have been an Old Testament saint at the time the gospel came to him. No wonder he is so quick to respond to the truth of the gospel. It is men like Cornelius who help me understand why Paul could so quickly appoint elders in the churches he planted. These church leaders must have been Gentiles who were very much like Cornelius, men who had considerable knowledge from the Old Testament, as well as knowledge about the life and ministry of Jesus. It was a short leap, so to speak, to trust in Jesus as the Promised Messiah, and to understand that He saves both Jews and Gentiles alike, on the basis of faith.

*(6) The baptism of the Spirit (Pentecost) and even the filling of the Spirit does not make one instantly spiritual, nor does it insure that one’s understanding of Scripture is complete.*Peter and his fellow apostles had been baptized by the Spirit at Pentecost, but they were surely wrong about the Gentiles and salvation. I sometimes hear or read of those who seem to think that if they’ve experienced the Spirit as folks did in the Book of Acts, they are assured of being spiritual, and of being right in their interpretation of Scripture. Peter was an apostle, and he was Spirit-filled at Pentecost. But Peter did not have it all figured out the moment the Spirit came upon him. It took the dramatic events of our text to convince Peter that he was wrong.

This text has removed all of our excuses for not seeking to fulfill the Great Commission. May God grant us the grace to pursue the evangelization of lost men, women and children, from every people group, tongue and tribe, to the glory of God.

[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P12_5527) Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the NET Bible. The NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION, also known as THE NET BIBLE, is a completely new translation of the Bible, not a revision or an update of a previous English version. It was completed by more than twenty biblical scholars who worked directly from the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. The translation project originally started as an attempt to provide an electronic version of a modern translation for electronic distribution over the Internet and on CD (compact disk). Anyone anywhere in the world with an Internet connection will be able to use and print out the NET Bible without cost for personal study. In addition, anyone who wants to share the Bible with others can print unlimited copies and give them away free to others. It is available on the Internet at: [www.netbible.org](http://www.netbible.org).

[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P14_6431) Copyright © 2006 by Community Bible Chapel, 418 E. Main Street, Richardson, TX 75081. This is the edited manuscript of Lesson 16 in the *Studies in the Book of Acts* series prepared by Robert L. Deffinbaugh on March 12, 2006. Anyone is at liberty to use this lesson for educational purposes only, with or without credit. The Chapel believes the material presented herein to be true to the teaching of Scripture, and desires to further, not restrict, its potential use as an aid in the study of God’s Word. The publication of this material is a grace ministry of Community Bible Chapel.

[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P20_8532) [Acts 1:4-5](javascript:%7b%7d).

[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P23_9688) We will shortly see from [Acts 11:20](javascript:%7b%7d) there were some who went out from Jerusalem who did preach the gospel to Gentiles, but this was not initiated or sanctioned, as yet, by the apostles.

[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P24_10597) See [Luke 7:3-5](javascript:%7b%7d); [Acts 10:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d), 31.

[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P31_14798) See [Acts 13:9](javascript:%7b%7d).

[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P34_15699) See how Paul develops this theme in [Romans 2:15-16](javascript:%7b%7d), 25-29. Those who would suggest that Peter and Paul were at odds with each other are simply (and badly) mistaken.

[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P36_16051) See [Romans 9:4-5](javascript:%7b%7d).

[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P61_20842) Take note of **“you know”** in [Acts 10:37](javascript:%7b%7d).

[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P63_21188) There is a certain similarity here to the baptism of our Lord. It was as the Spirit came upon our Lord and remained on Him that John the Baptist recognized Jesus as the Messiah ([John 1:32-34](javascript:%7b%7d)). Our Lord’s baptism designated Him as the Messiah and empowered Him for His ministry. When the Spirit baptized Cornelius and his household, it designated them as true believers.

[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P68_24692) It seems as though the only news communicated was that Peter had gone to a Gentile home, eaten with them, and preached the gospel. The full account of what happened does not seem to be told until Peter himself tells it.

[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P79_28288) We see this same connection again in [Acts 19:1-7](javascript:%7b%7d).

[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P81_28549) See [Matthew 3:11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 1:8](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 3:16](javascript:%7b%7d); [John 1:33](javascript:%7b%7d).

[14](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P82_28764) See also [Acts 19:5-6](javascript:%7b%7d).

[15](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P99_35872) Who were considered half-Jews.

[16](https://bible.org/seriespage/gentile-faith-jewish-fears-acts-1036-1130" \l "P107_40275) See, for example, [Romans 3:4, 6, 31](javascript:%7b%7d). It is now translated **“Absolutely not!”** (NET Bible) or **“May it never be”** (NASB), but I still like the old King James rendering, **“God forbid!”**

**The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit**

Delivered on Sabbath Morning, June 20, 1858, by the REV. C. H. Spurgeon  
at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens  
at [*https://www.monergism.com/outpouring-holy-spirit*](https://www.monergism.com/outpouring-holy-spirit)

"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the Word"  
—Acts 10:44.

Text

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THE BIBLE IS A BOOK of the Revelation of God. The God after whom the heathen blindly searched, and for whom reason gropes in darkness, is here plainly revealed to us in the pages of divine authorship, so that he who is willing to understand as much of Godhead as man can know, may here learn it if he be not willingly ignorant and wilfully obstinate. The doctrine of the Trinity is specially taught in Holy Scripture. The word certainly does not occur, but the three divine persons of the One God are frequently and constantly mentioned, and Holy Scripture is exceedingly careful that we should all receive and believe that great truth of the Christian religion, that the Father is God, that the Son is God, that the Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods but one God: though they be each of them very God of very God, yet three in one and one in three is the Jehovah whom we worship. You will notice in the works of *Creation* how carefully the Scriptures assure us that all the three divine persons took their share. "In the beginning Jehovah created the heavens and the earth;" and in another place we are told that God said "Let us make man"—not one person, but all three taking counsel with each other with regard to the making of mankind. We know that the Father hath laid the foundations and fixed those solid beams of light on which the blue arches of the sky are sustained; but we know with equal certainty that Jesus Christ, the eternal *Logos,* was with the Father in the beginning, and "without him was not anything made that was made:" moreover we have equal certainty that the Holy Spirit had a hand in Creation, for we are told that "the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the earth; and the spirit of the Lord moved upon the face of the waters;" and brooding with his dove-like wing, he brought out of the egg of chaos this mighty thing, the fair round world. We have the like proof of the three persons in the Godhead in the matter of *Salvation.* We know that God the, Father gave his Son; we have abundant proof that God the Father chose his people from before the foundations of the world, that he did invent the plan of salvation, and hath always given his free, willing, and joyous consent to the salvation of his people. With regard to the share that the Son had in salvation, that is apparent enough to all. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he was incarnate in a mortal body; he was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hades; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven; he sitteth at the right hand of God, where also he maketh intercession for us. As to the Holy Spirit, we have equally sure proof that the Spirit of God worketh in conversion; for everywhere we are said to be begotten of the Holy Spirit; continually it is declared, that unless a man be born again from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God; while all the virtues and the graces of Christianity are described as being the fruits of the Spirit, because the Holy Spirit doth from first to last work in us and carry out that which Jesus Christ hath beforehand worked for us in his great redemption, which also God the Father hath designed for us in his great predestinating scheme of salvation.

Now, it is to the work of the Holy Spirit that I shall this morning specially direct your attention; and I may as well mention the reason why I do so. It is this. We have received continually fresh confirmations of the good news from a far country, which has already made glad the hearts of many of God's people. In the United States of America there is certainly a great awakening. No sane man living there could think of denying it. There may be something of spurious excitement mixed up with it, but that good, lasting good, has been accomplished, no rational man can deny. Two hundred and fifty thousand persons—that is a quarter of a million—profess to have been regenerated since December last, have made a profession of their faith, and have united themselves with different sections of God's church. The work still progresses, if anything, at a more rapid rate than before, and that which makes me believe the work to be genuine is just this—that the enemies of Christ's holy gospel are exceedingly wroth at it. When the devil roars at anything, you may rest assured there is some good in it. The devil is not like some dogs we know of; he never barks unless there is something to bark at. When Satan howls we may rest assured he is afraid his kingdom is in danger. Now this great work in America has been manifestly caused by the outpouring of the Spirit, for no one minister has been a leader in it. All the ministers of the gospel have co-operated in it, but none of them have stood in the van. God himself has been the leader of his own hosts. It began with a desire for prayer. God's people began to pray; the prayer-meetings were better attended than before. it was then proposed to hold meetings at times that had never been set apart for prayer; these also were well attended; and now, in the city of Philadelphia, at the hour of noon, every day in the week, three thousand persons can always be seen assembled together for prayer in one place. Men of business, in the midst of their toil and labor, find an opportunity of running in there and offering a word of prayer, and then return to their occupations. And so, throughout all the States, prayer-meetings, larger or smaller in number, have been convened. And there has been real prayer. Sinners beyond all count, have risen up in the prayer-meeting, and have requested the people of God to pray for them; thus making public to the world that they had a desire after Christ; they have been prayed for, and the church has seen that God verily doth hear and answer prayer. I find that the Unitarian ministers for a little while took no notice of it. Theodore Parker snarls and raves tremendously at it, but he is evidently in a maze; he does not understand the mystery, and acts with regard to it as swine are said to do with pearls. While the church was found asleep, and doing very little, the Socinian could afford to stand in his pulpit and sneer at anything like evangelical religion, but now that there has been an awakening, he looks like a man that has just awakened out of sleep. He sees something; he does not know what it is. The power of religion is just that which will always puzzle the Unitarian, for he knows but little about that. At the form of religion he is not much amazed, for he can to an extent endorse that himself, but the supernaturalism of the gospel—the mystery—the miracle—the power—the demonstration of the Spirit that comes with the preaching, is what such men cannot comprehend, and they gaze and wonder, and then become filled with wrath, but still they have to confess there is something there they cannot understand, a mental phenomenon that is far beyond their philosophy—a thing which they cannot reach by all their science nor understand by all their reason.  
  
Now, if we have the like effect produced in this land, the one thing we must seek is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and I thought, perhaps, this morning in preaching upon the work of the Holy Spirit, that text might be fulfilled—"Him that honoureth me I will honor." My sincere desire is to honor the Holy Spirit this morning, and if he will be pleased to honor his church in return, unto him shall be the glory for ever.  
  
"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." In the first place, I shall endeavor to describe *the method of the Spirit's operation,* secondly, *the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit's influence,* if we could see men converted, and then, in the third place, I shall suggest the ways and means by which under divine grace we may obtain a like falling down of the Spirit upon our churches.  
  
1. In the first place, then, I will endeavor to explain THE METHOD OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S OPERATIONS. But let me guard myself against being misunderstood. We can explain what the Spirit does, but how he does it, no man must pretend to know. The work of the Holy Spirit is the peculiar mystery of the Christian religion. Almost any other thing is plain, but this must remain an inscrutable secret into which it were wrong for us to attempt to pry. Who knoweth where the winds are begotten? Who knoweth, therefore, how the Spirit worketh, for he is like the wind? "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." In Holy Scripture certain great secrets of nature are mentioned as being parallel with the secret working of the Spirit. The procreation of children is instanced as a parallel wonder, for we know not the mystery thereof; how much less, therefore, shall we expect to know that more secret and hidden mystery of the new birth and new creation of man in Christ Jesus. But let no man be staggered at this, for they are mysteries in nature: the wisest man will tell you there are depths in nature into which he cannot dive, and heights into which he cannot soar. He who pretends to have unravelled the knot of creation hath made a mistake, he may have cut the knot by his rough ignorance, and by his foolish conjectures, but the knot itself must remain beyond the power of man's unravelling, until God himself shall explain the secret. There are marvellous things, that, as yet, men have sought to know in vain. They may, perhaps, discover many of them, but how the Spirit works, no man can know. But now I wish to explain what the Holy Spirit does, although we cannot tell how he does it. I take it that the Holy Spirit's work in conversion is two-fold. First it is an awakening of the powers that man already has, and secondly, it is an implantation of powers which he never had at all.  
  
In the great work of the new birth, the Holy Spirit first of all *awakens the mental powers;* for be it remembered that, the Holy Spirit never gives any man new *mental* powers. Take for instance reason—the Holy Spirit does not give men reason, for they have reason prior to their conversion. What the Holy Spirit does is to teach our reason, right reason—to set our reason in the right track, so that he can use it for the high purpose of discerning between good and evil; between the precious and vile. The Holy Spirit does not give man a will, for man has a will before; but he makes the will that was in bondage to Satan free to the service of God. The Holy Spirit gives no man the power to think, or the organ of belief—for man has power to believe or think as far as the mental act is concerned; but he gives that belief which is already there a tendency to believe the right thing, and he gives to the power of thought the propensity to think in the right way so that instead of thinking irregularly, we begin to think as God would have us think, and our mind desireth to walk in the steps of God's revealed truth There may be here, this morning, a man of enlarged understanding in things political—but his understanding is darkened with regard to spiritual things—he sees no beauty in the person of Christ—he sees nothing desirable in the way of holiness—he chooses the evil and forsakes the good. Now the Holy Spirit will not give him a new understanding, but he will cleanse his old understanding so that he will discern between things that differ, and shall discover that it is but a poor thing to enjoy "the pleasures of sin for a season," and let go an "eternal weight of glory." There shall be a man here too who is desperately set against religion, and willeth not to come to God, and do what we will, we are not able to persuade him to change his mind and turn to God. The Holy Spirit will not make a new will in that man, but he will turn his old will, and instead of willing to do evil he will make him will to do right—he will make him will to be saved by Christ—he will make him "willing in the day of his power." Remember, there is no power in man so fallen but that the Holy Spirit can raise it up. However debased a man may be, in one instant, by the miraculous power of the Spirit, all his faculties may be cleansed and purged. Ill-judging reason may be made to judge rightly; stout, obstinate wills may be made to run willingly in the ways of God's commandments; evil and depraved affections may in an instant be turned to Christ, and old desires that are tainted with vice, may be replaced by heavenly aspirations. The work of the Spirit on the mind is the re-modelling of it; the new forming of it. He doth not bring new material to the mind—it is in another part of the man that he puts up a new structure—but he puts the mind that had fallen out of order into its proper shape. He builds up pillars that had fallen down, and erects the palaces that had crumbled to the earth. This is the first work of the Holy Spirit upon the mind of man.  
  
Besides this, the Holy Spirit gives to men *powers which they never had before.* According to Scripture, I believe man is constituted in a three-fold manner. He has a body; by the Holy Spirit that body is made the temple of the Lord. He has a mind; by the Holy Spirit that mind is made like an altar in the temple. But man by nature is nothing higher than that; he is mere body and soul. When the Spirit comes, he breathes into him a third higher principle which we call the spirit. The apostle describes man as man, "body, soul and spirit." Now if you search all the mental writers through, you will find they all declare there are only two parts—body and mind; and they are quite right, for they deal with unregenerate man; but in regenerate man there is a third principle as much superior to mere mind as mind is superior to dead animal matter—that third principle is that with which a man prays; it is that with which he lovingly believes; or rather it is that which compels the mind to perform their acts. It is that which, operating upon the mind, makes the same use of the mind as the mind does of the body. When, after desiring to walk I make my legs move, it is my mind that compels them; and so my Spirit, when I desire to pray, compels my mind to think the thought of prayer and compels my soul also, if I desire to praise, to think the thought of praise, and lift itself upward towards God. As the body without the soul is dead, so the soul without the Spirit is dead, and one work of the Spirit is to quicken the dead soul by breathing into it the firing Spirit; as it is written, "The first man, Adam, was made a living *soul,* but the second Adam was made a quickening *Spirit"*—and, "as we have borne the image of the earthy, so must we bear the image of the heavenly;" that is, we must have in us, if we would be converted, the quickening Spirit, which is put into us by God the Holy Ghost. I say again, the spirit has powers which the mind never has. It has the power of communion with Christ, which to a degree is a mental act, but it can no more be performed by man without the Spirit, than the act of walking could be performed by man, if he were destitute of a soul to suggest the idea of walking. The Spirit suggests the thoughts of communion which the mind obeys and carries out. Nay, there are times, I think, when the spirit leaves the mind altogether, times when we forget everything of earth and one almost ceases to think, to reason, to judge, to weigh, or to will. Our souls are like the chariots of Amminadib, drawn swiftly onwards without any powers of volition. We lean upon the breast of Jesus, and in rhapsody divine, and in ecstasy celestial, we enjoy the fruits of the land of the blessed, and pluck the clusters of Eschol before entering into the land of promise.  
  
I think I have clearly put these two points before you. The work of the Spirit consists, first, in awakening powers already possessed by man, but which were asleep and out of order; and in the next place in putting into man powers which he had not before. And to make this simple to the humblest mind, let me suppose man to be something like a machine; all the wheels are out of order, the cogs do not strike upon each other, the wheels do not turn regularly, the rods will not act, the order is gone. Now, the first work of the Spirit is to put these wheels in the right place, to fit the wheels upon the axles, to put the right axle to the right wheel, then to put wheel to wheel, so that they may act upon each other. But that is not all his work. The next thing is to put fire and steam so that these things shall go to work. He does not put fresh wheels, he puts old wheels into order, and then he puts the motive power which is to move the whole. First he puts our mental powers into their proper order and condition, and then he puts a living quickening spirit, so that all these shall move according to the holy will and law of God.  
  
But, mark you, this is not all the Holy Spirit does. For if he were to do this, and then leave us, none of us would get to heaven. If any of you should be so near to heaven that you could hear the angels singing over the walls—if you could almost see within the pearly gates still, if the Holy Spirit did not help you the last step, you would never enter there. All the work is through his divine operation. Hence it is the Spirit who keeps the wheels in motion, and who tales away that defilement which, naturally engendered by our original sin, falls upon the machine and puts it out of order. He takes this away, and keeps the machine constantly going without injury, until at last he removes man from the place of defilement to the land of the blessed, a perfect creature, as perfect as he was when he came from the mould of his Maker.  
  
And I must say, before I leave this point, that all the former part of what I have mentioned is done instantaneously. When a man is converted to God, it is done in a moment. Regeneration is an instantaneous work. Conversion to God, the fruit of regeneration, occupies all our life, but regeneration itself is effected in an instant. A man hates God; the Holy Spirit makes him love God. A man is opposed to Christ, he hates his gospel, does not understand it and will not receive it: the Holy Spirit comes, puts light into his darkened understanding, takes the chain from his bandaged will, gives liberty to his conscience, gives life to his dead soul, so that the voice of conscience is heard, and the man becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. And all this is done, mark you, by the instantaneous supernatural influence of God the Holy Ghost working as he willeth among the sons of men.  
  
II. Having thus dwelt upon the method of the Holy Spirit's work, I shall now turn to the second point, THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF THE SPIRIT'S WORK IN ORDER TO CONVERSION. In our text we are told that "while Peter spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." Beloved, the Holy Ghost fell on Peter first, or else it would not have fallen on his hearers. There is a necessity that the preacher himself, if we are to have souls saved, should be under the influence of the Spirit. I have constantly made it my prayer that I might be guided by the Spirit even in the smallest and least important parts of the service; for you cannot tell but that the salvation of a soul may depend upon the reading of a hymn, or upon the selection of a chapter. Two persons have joined our church and made a profession of being converted simply through my reading a hymn—

"Jesus, lover of my soul"

They did not remember anything else in the hymn, but those words made such a deep impression upon their mind, that they could not help repeating them for days afterwards, and then the thought arose, "Do I love Jesus?" And then they considered what strange ingratitude it was that he should be the lover of their souls, and yet they should not love him. Now I believe the Holy Spirit led me to read that hymn. And many persons have been converted by some striking saying of the preacher. But why was it the preacher uttered that saying? Simply because he was led thereunto by the Holy Spirit. Rest assured, beloved, that when any part of the sermon is blessed to your heart, the minister said it because he was ordered to say it by his Master. I might preach to-day a sermon which I preached on Friday, and which was useful then, and there might be no good whatever come from it now, because it might not be the sermon which the Holy Ghost would have delivered to-day. But if with sincerity of heart I have sought God's guidance in selecting the topic, and he rests upon me in the preaching of the Word, there is no fear but that it shall be found adapted to your immediate wants. The Holy Spirit must rest upon your preachers. Let them have all the learning of the wisest men, and all the eloquence of such men as Desmosthenes and Cicero, still the Word cannot be blessed to you, unless first of all the Spirit of God hath guided the minister's mind in the selection of his subject, and in the discussion of it.  
  
But if Peter himself were under the hand of the Spirit, that would fail unless the Spirit of God, then, did fall upon our hearers; and I shall endeavor now to show the absolute necessity of the Spirit's work in the conversion of men.  
  
Let us remember what kind of thing the work is, and we shall see that other means are altogether out of the question. It is quite certain that men cannot be converted by physical means. The Church of Rome thought that she could convert men by means of armies; so she invaded countries, and threatened them with war and bloodshed unless they would repent and embrace her religion. However, it availed but little, and men were prepared to die rather than leave their faith; she therefore tried those beautiful things—stakes, racks, dungeons, axes, swords, fire; and by these things she hoped to convert men. You have heard of the man who tried to wind up his watch with a pick-axe. That man was extremely wise, compared with the man who thought to touch mind through matter. All the machines you like to invent cannot touch mind. Talk about tying angel's wings with green withes, or manacling the cherubim with iron chains, and then talk about meddling with the minds of men through physical means. Why, the things don't set; they cannot act. All the king's armies that ever were, and all the warriors clothed with mail, with all their ammunition, could never touch the mind of man. That is an impregnable castle which is not to be reached by physical agency.  
  
Nor, again, can man be converted by moral argument. "Well," says one, "I think he may. Let a minister preach earnestly, and he may persuade men to be converted." Ah! beloved, it is for want of knowing better that you say so. Melancthon thought so, but you know what he said after he tried it—"Old Adam is too strong for young Melancthon." So will every preacher find it, if he thinks his arguments can ever convert man. Let me give you a parallel case. Where is the logic that can persuade an Ethiopian to change his skin? By what argument can you induce a leopard to renounce his spots? Even so may he that is accustomed to do evil learn to do well. But if the Ethiopian's skin be changed it must be by a supernatural process. and if the leopard's spots be removed, he that made the leopard must do it. Even so is it with the heart of man. If sin were a thing *ab extra* and external, we could induce man to change it. For instance, you may induce a man to leave off drunkenness or swearing, because those things are not a part of his nature—he has added that vice to his original depravity. But the hidden evil at the heart is beyond all moralsuasion. I dare say a man might have enough argument to induce him to hang himself, but I am certain no argument will ever induce him to hang his sins, to hang his self-righteousness, and to come and humble himself at the foot of the cross; for the religion of Christ is so contrary to all the propensities of man, that it is like swimming against the stream to approach it, for the stream of man's will and man's desire is exactly the opposite of the religion of Jesus Christ. If you wanted a proof of that, at the lifting of my finger, there are thousands in this hall who would rise to prove it, for they would say, "I have found it so sir, in my experience; I hated religion as much as any men; I despised Christ, and his people, and I know not to this day how it is that I am what I am, unless it be the work of God." I have seen the tears run down a man's cheeks when he has come to me in order to be united to the church of Christ, and he has said, "Sir, I wonder how it is I am here to-day, if anyone had told me a year ago that I should think as I now think, and feel as I now feel, I should have called him a born fool for his pains; I used to say I never would be one of those canting Methodists, I liked to spend my Sunday in pleasure, and I did not see why I was to be cooping myself up in the house of God listening to a man talk. *I* pray, sir? No, not I. I said the best providence in all the world was a good strong pair of hands, and to take care of what you got. If any man talked to me about religion, why I would slam the door in his face, and pretty soon put him out; but the things that I loved then, I now hate, and the things that then I hated, now I love, I cannot do or say enough to show how total is the change that has been wrought in me. It must have been the work of God; it could not have been wrought by me, I feel assured; it must be some one greater than myself, who could thus turn my heart." I think these two things are proofs that we want something more than nature, and since physical agency will not do, and mere moral suasion will never accomplish it, that there must be an absolute necessity for the Holy Spirit.  
  
But again, if you will just think a minute what the work is, you will soon see that none but God can accomplish it. In the Holy Scripture, conversion is often spoken of as being a new creation. If you talk about creating yourselves, I should feel obliged if you would create a fly first. Create a gnat. create a grain of sand, and when you have created that, you may talk about creating a new heart. Both are alike, impossible, for creation is the work of God. But still, if you could create a grain of dust, or create even a world, it would not be half the miracle, for you must first find a thing which has created itself. Could that be? Suppose you had no existence, how could you create yourself? Nothing cannot produce anything. Now, how can man re-create himself. A man cannot create himself into a new condition, when he has no being in that condition, but is, as yet, a thing that is not.  
  
Then, again, the work of creation is said to be like the resurrection. "We are alive from the dead." Now, can the dead in the grave raise themselves. Let any minister who thinks he can convert souls, go and raise a corpse let him go and stand in one of the cemeteries, and bid the tombs open wide their mouths, and make room for those once buried there to awaken, and he will have to preach in vain. But if he could do it, that is not the miracle: it is for the dead to raise themselves, for an inaminate corpse to kindle in its own breast the spark of life anew. If the work be a resurrection, a creation, does it not strike you that it must be beyond the power of man? It must be wrought in him by no one less than God himself.  
  
And there is yet one more consideration, and I shall have concluded this point. Beloved, even if man could save himself, I would have you recollect how averse he is to it? If we could make our hearers all willing, the battle would be accomplished. "Well," says one, "If I am willing to be saved, can I not be saved?" Assuredly you can, but the difficulty is, we cannot bring men to be willing. That shows, therefore, that there must be a constraint put upon their will. There must be an influence exerted upon them, which they have not in themselves, in order to make them willing in the day of God's power. And this is the glory of the Christian religion. The Christian religion has within its own bowels power to spread itself. We do not ask you to be willing first. We come and tell you the news, and we believe that the Spirit of God working with us, will make you willing. If the progress of the Christian religion depended upon the voluntary assent of mankind it would never go an inch further but because the Christian religion has within an omnipotent influence, constraining men to believe it, it is therefore that it is and must be triumphant, "till like a sea of glory it spreads from shore to shore."  
  
III. Now I shall conclude by bringing one or two thoughts forward, with regard to WHAT MUST BE DONE AT THIS TIME IN ORDER TO BRING DOWN THE HOLY SPIRIT. It is quite certain, beloved, if the Holy Spirit willed to do it, that every man, woman, and child in this place might be converted now. If God, the Sovereign Judge of all, would be pleased now to send out his Spirit, every inhabitant of this million-peopled city might be brought at once to turn unto the living God. Without instrumentality, without the preacher, without books, without anything, God has it in his power to convert men. We have known persons about their business, not thinking about religion at all, who have had a thought injected into their heart, and that thought has been the prolific mother of a thousand meditations. and through these meditations they have been brought to Christ. Without the aid of the minister, the Holy Spirit has thus worked, and to-day he is not restrained. There may be some men, great in infidelity, staunch in opposition to the cross of Christ, but, without asking their consent, the Holy Spirit can pull down the strong man, and make the mighty man bow himself. For when we talk of the Omnipotent God, there is nothing too great for him to do. But, beloved, God has been pleased to put great honor upon instrumentality; he could work without it if he pleased but he does not do so. However, this is the first thought I want to give you; if you would have the Holy Spirit exert himself in our midst, you must first of all look to him and not to instrumentality. When Jesus Christ preached, there were very few converted under him, and the reason was, because the Holy Spirit was not abundantly poured forth. He had the Holy Spirit without measure himself, but on others the Holy Spirit was not as yet poured out. Jesus Christ said, "Greater works than these shall ye do because I go to my Father, in order to send the Holy Spirit;" and recollect that those few who were converted under Christ's ministry, were not converted by him, but by the Holy Spirit that rested upon him at that time. Jesus of Nazareth was anointed of the Holy Spirit. Now then, if Jesus Christ, the great founder of our religion, needed to be anointed of the Holy Spirit, how much more our ministers? And if God would always make the distinction even between his own Son as an instrument, and the Holy Spirit as the agent, how much more ought we to be careful to do that between poor puny men and the Holy Spirit? Never let us hear you say again, "So many persons were converted by So-and so." They were not. If converted they were not converted by man. Instrumentality is to be used, but the Spirit is to have the honor of it. Pay no more a superstitious reverence to man, think no more that God is tied to your plans, and to your agencies. Do not imagine that so many city missionaries, so much good will be done. Do not say, "So many preachers; so many sermons, so many souls saved." Do not say, "So many Bibles, so many tracts; so much good done." Not so, use these, but remember it is not in that proportion the blessing comes; it is, so much Holy Spirit, so many souls in-gathered.  
  
And now another thought. If we would have the Spirit, beloved, we must each of us try to honor him. There are some chapels into which if you were to enter, you would never know there was a Holy Spirit. Mary Magdalen said of old, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him," and the Christian might often say so, for there is nothing said about the Lord until they come to the end, and then there is just the benediction, or else you would not know that there were three persons in one God at all. Until our churches honor the Holy Spirit, we shall never see it abundantly manifested in our midst. Let the preacher always confess before he preaches that he relies upon the Holy Spirit. Let him burn his manuscript and depend upon the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit does not come to help him, let him be still and let the people go home and pray that the Spirit will help him next Sunday.  
  
And do you also, in the use of all your agencies, always honor the Spirit? We often begin our religious meetings without prayer; it is all wrong. We must honor the Spirit; unless we put him first, he will never make crowns for us to wear. He will get victories, but he will have the honor of them, and if we do not give to him the honor, he will never give to us the privilege and success. And best of all, if you would have the Holy Spirit, let us meet together earnestly to pray for him. Remember, the Holy Spirit will not come to us as a church, unless we seek him. "For this thing will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." We purpose during the coming week to hold meetings of special prayer, to supplicate for a revival of religion. On the Friday morning I opened the first prayer meeting at Trinity Chapel, Brixton; and, I think, at seven o'clock, we had as many as two hundred and fifty persons gathered together. It was a pleasant sight. During the hour, nine brethren prayed, one after the other; and I am sure there was the spirit of prayer there. Some persons present sent up their names, asking that we would offer special petitions for them; and I doubt not the prayers will be answered; At Park Street, on Monday morning, we shall have a prayer. meeting from eight to nine; then during the rest of the week there will be a prayer-meeting in the morning from seven to eight. On Monday evening we shall have the usual prayer-meeting at seven, when I hope there will be a large number attending. I find that my brother, Baptist Noel, has commenced morning and evening prayer-meetings, and they have done the same thing in Norwich and many provincial towns, where, without any pressure, the people are found willing to come. I certainly did not expect to see so many as two hundred and fifty persons at an early hour in the morning meet together for prayer. I believe it was a good sign The Lord hath put prayer into their hearts and therefore they were willing to come, "Prove me now here, saith the Lord of host., and see if I do not pour you out a blessing so that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Let us meet and pray, and if God doth not hear us, it will be the first time he has broken his promise. Come, let us go up to the sanctuary; let us meet together in the house of the Lord, and offer solemn supplication; and I say again, if the Lord doth not make bare his arm in the sight of all the people, it will be the reverse of all his previous actions, it will be the contrary of all his promises, and contradictory to himself. We have only to try him, and the result is certain. In dependence on his Spirit, if we only meet for prayer, the Lord shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him. O Lord, lift up thyself because of thine enemies; pluck thy right hand out of thy bosom, O Lord our God, for Christ's sake, Amen.