

## **God Brings Together into One New Man both Jews and Gentiles**

Acts 10:21-33

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It is one thing for God to tear down the wall between Himself and sinners who trust alone in Jesus alone through the death of Jesus Christ as a legal fact in the court of heaven. But dear ones, it is another thing for you to live out that truth so that which is judicially true in the court of heaven is experienced every day in your Christian life. So much of what is at the root of your failure and mine to walk in the newness of life is that we forget, neglect, or even doubt that God is for us and not against us, that Jesus has already conquered the world, the flesh, and the devil, and that we are therefore more than conquerors through Jesus. We are hearers of the Word, but fail so often to be doers of the Word in applying these truths to our lives. There is a transfer of power from that which is legally true to that which is practically true when faith is exercised in the truth and promise of God (Romans 6:1-2, 11). In other words, that which is true before the holy tribunal of God is to be reckoned as true in your daily life.

Consider as well that the Lord Jesus has already legally purchased for you through His death and resurrection everything you need to live a godly life now and for all eternity. And yet how many Christians practically live as though they were paupers, having all these needs, but living as though there is no one to supply those needs (Philippians 4:13,19).

Likewise, dear ones, the Apostle Peter was given a revelation from God that Jesus had legally torn down the wall that separated Christians from all unclean animals/foods (Acts 10:9-20), and had torn down the wall that separated Jewish Christians from Gentile Christians. Now Peter is called by God to take that which is legally and judicially true in the court of heaven and to apply that truth in a very practical way with Cornelius, the Gentile Roman centurion. Dear ones, this is growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ—applying by faith what is already true of us legally in the courtroom of God. To the extent that we do so, to that extent we will grow and mature in our Christian walk. To the extent that we fail to do so, to that extent we will see little or no growth. Let us consider how Peter applied by faith the truth revealed to him in the divine vision. The main points from our text are the following: (1) Peter Brings “Unclean” Gentiles into His Lodging (Acts 10:21-23); (2) Peter Goes into the Lodging of an “Unclean” Gentile (Acts 10:24-33).

### **I. Peter Brings “Unclean” Gentiles into His Lodging (Acts 10:21-23).**

A. God gave two visions in Acts 10: one to Cornelius to send for Peter (Acts 10:1-8); and one to Peter to prepare him to go unto Cornelius (Acts 10:9-20).

1. Jesus tore down the wall of unclean animals/foods that separated Jews from Gentiles in order that He might reveal His mercy to “unclean” Gentiles and might include in His one Church both Jews and Gentiles throughout the whole world.

2. Acts 10 is such a pivotal chapter in redemptive history that the vision to Cornelius is repeated three times by others after it was given (in Acts 10:22 by the servants of Cornelius to Peter; in Acts 10:30-32 by Cornelius to Peter; and in Acts 11:13-14 by Peter to the apostles and Jewish brethren in Jerusalem); and the vision to Peter is recounted two times after it was given (in Acts 10:28 by Peter to Cornelius; and in Acts 11:5-10 by Peter to the apostles and Jewish brethren in Jerusalem). The recounting of these visions several times is in order to make clear the certainty of truth revealed by God in these visions. One time is sufficient for God to state with absolute authority what is His will; so when He does so more than

once, He is patiently instructing us (His dear children) and even placing as it were two or three exclamation points afterward for emphasis.

3. The repetition of these visions was surely necessary, for there was at that time no greater wall in hindering reconciliation with God (because there were Jews within the Church that trusted in and boasted in the Old Covenant ceremonies) and no greater wall in hindering reconciliation between fellow Christians (because there were Jews within the Church that would not eat and fellowship with “unclean” Gentiles who ate “unclean” food).

a. Consider how serious this problem continued to be and the need to repeat these visions by Luke. Approximately 10 years after Peter’s vision that God had cleansed “unclean” animals and that God had also made “unclean” Gentiles clean, Jewish Christians were still promoting the false view that they could not eat with Gentile Christians (Galatians 2). Paul even had to rebuke the hypocrisy of Peter who discontinued eating with the Gentile believers because certain Jewish believers from Jerusalem had come to Antioch.

b. The repetition of these visions is also needed today, when we see professing Christians returning to the religious celebration of Old Covenant ceremonies, holy days, and dietary laws. In so doing, they make themselves transgressors by building again the wall that God tore down (Galatians 2:18). To return to these helps and aids given by God to the Old Testament Church in its childhood (Galatians 4:1-2), would be like an adult returning to riding his tricycle after having learned how to drive a car. The same may be said of those professing Christians who claim to be waiting for the rebuilding of the temple and the offering of sacrifice—and all with God’s approval. Dear ones, let us move on to maturity in Christ and put away all such ordinances of the Old Testament Church’s childhood that have been abolished by Christ.

B. After Peter received the vision of the unclean animals, in which he was commanded not to call unclean what God had cleansed (Acts 10:13-15), Peter was then commanded by the Holy Spirit to go with the servants of Cornelius who were at that very moment seeking him at the gate below (Acts 10:19-20). God’s plan is coming together—not a minute too early or too late.

C. Peter asks the strangers who it is they seek and why they have come (Acts 10:21). Then the two household servants of Cornelius and a faithful soldier under his command briefly relate the divine vision Cornelius had received (Acts 10:22). But in the next verse, we begin to see how Peter is applying by faith what he had received by revelation—Peter calls these Gentiles into the apartment where he is staying and gives them lodging for the night (and no doubt an evening meal and a morning meal the following day).

1. It was noted in a previous sermon that the Lord was preparing Peter for these monumental changes back in Acts 9:43, when the Scripture states that he was lodging many days in the home of a tanner by the name of Simon. A tanner was one of the most unclean trades in ancient society. The nature of their work with unclean animals kept them in a state of ritual uncleanness (Leviticus 11:35). Though not forbidden in the Law of God if working with clean animals, the rabbis mention tanners or tanneries in the context of other “unclean things.” So this was a preparatory step in God’s plan to break down the wall of “unclean” animals that separated Jews from Gentiles.

2. And here we now see that Peter has taken another step in practically breaking down that wall of the ceremonial and dietary laws of the Old Covenant. He invites “unclean” Gentiles into his apartment where he is staying, and feeds them and lodges them. That was a major step because Gentiles were considered “unclean” due to being uncircumcised and due to eating “unclean” animals. And yet God has revealed the truth, and now Peter must apply the truth he has received.

3. This step of applying the truth of the vision was perhaps a half-step to the full goal (which will be realized in the next main point), but it was an important step in Peter’s obedience and submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. If Peter could not invite “unclean” Gentiles into his home and feed

them, he would certainly not then go into the home of an “unclean” Gentile or eat their “unclean” food with them. Likewise, dear ones, if we will not obey the Lord and submit to the authority of Jesus Christ in what might be considered lesser commands of Christ, then why should we believe we will do so with the greater commands of Christ? Dear ones, if it is a command of the Lord Jesus, His full authority upholds it (whether we call it a “white” lie that hurts no one, or whether we call it a mere lustful thought that no one else sees). We may try to excuse our disobedience by minimizing God’s authority in His commands, comparing ourselves to others who are far worse, or blaming others for our disobedience. This is not submission to the Lordship of Christ, but rather is placing Christ under our lordship—we are simply obeying when it is convenient for us.

4. Dear ones, your submission to Jesus Christ is not merely in the “important” commands of the Lord found in His Word, but is in all His commands (the explicit commands, but also in the implicit commands—explicit idolatry in bowing down to false god and implicit idolatry in adding to or taking away from the worship He has authorized in His Word—explicit murder or implicit anger—explicit adultery or implicit impurity in sight or thought). So we see here in Acts 10:23 that Peter obeys the Lord by lodging and feeding “unclean” Gentiles (lesser), and then he is ready to obey the Lord (in the greater) by accompanying the servants and soldier of Cornelius the following day with six Jewish Christians from the congregation in Joppa (Acts 11:12) to the home of Cornelius (greater).

## **II. Peter Goes into the Lodging of an “Unclean” Gentile (Acts 10:24-33).**

A. This small group is now headed for Caesarea to the home of the Gentile believer, Cornelius, a Roman centurion. Though it may have been a small group, it was breaking through and tearing down a huge wall.

1. It is not always large multitudes that are led and blessed by the Lord to bring reformation to the Church. At times it is the small group and the few that does not despise the day of small things and that the Lord blesses with the truth of Jesus Christ and the courage to practice that truth even when the majority will not follow.

2. Beloved, it is not size that determines truth and faithfulness to the doctrine, worship, government, and discipline of Scripture, but rather it is the authority of God speaking in His Word that determines truth and those are faithful who stand for it (regardless of their size). We are not to follow the multitude to do evil (Exodus 23:2).

B. Cornelius is waiting in great expectation and has also brought family and friends together to hear the Word of God given to Peter (Acts 10:24).

1. Cornelius was not afraid of offending family and friends with what God would give to Peter to declare unto them. He earnestly desired not only for himself, but for all who were close to him that they also hear the message from God.

2. Dear ones, sometimes we walk so gingerly and are so fearful of offending family and friends that we almost seem ashamed of the gospel and truth of Scripture forgetting that it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes and that the doctrine of Scripture (Romans 1:16). Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

C. Cornelius is overwhelmed at seeing Peter and falls down at his feet and our text says, “worshipped him” (Acts 10:25). It seems very unlikely that Cornelius (whom we have already noted in a previous sermon was likely a believer by this time) worshipped Peter, as if he were God or some divine person. There are times the Greek word here translated “worshipped” means to show respect and honor (Matthew 18:26). It seems more likely that Cornelius knew from the divine vision that this Peter was a prophet of God (a mouthpiece of God); and should be shown such honor and respect. And yet, even with this understanding of

the word translated “worshipped”, Peter wants nothing by way of that kind of honor given to him as the minister of Jesus Christ. Rather Peter commands Cornelius to stand up, because he is a mere man undeserving of such religious honor that Cornelius should fall down at his feet.

1. Dear ones, does this not show how careful Christians should be not to place ministers of Jesus Christ on a pedestal (and likewise that ministers should not encourage or exploit such honor)?

a. Once ministers of Jesus Christ are given and they receive that kind of special honor, it is only a matter of time (as history reveals) that they will take more and more honor to themselves and will then usurp the honor, titles, and prerogatives that belong alone to Jesus Christ—just as we see has been done in the Roman Catholic Church, where the papal antichrist is given and receives many such acts and gestures of religious honor as bowing to him and kissing his toe, and who has likewise usurped the title and authority of Jesus Christ as visible head of the Church on earth. If Peter commanded Cornelius to stand up, then certainly he who falsely claims to be the successor to Peter ought to do the same (but that is just another way we see the claim of the papal antichrist to be the successor of Peter to be a false claim).

b. Paul speaks for all ministers when he says, we are nothing, and God is everything (1 Corinthians 3:5-7). Beware of personality cults among religious leaders and preachers. It is not the minister’s church—it is the Church of Jesus Christ, and His alone! With John the Baptist the faithful minister (and faithful Christian) must declare: He must increase, and I must decrease! More of Him and less of me!

2. One more thing before moving on is this: when Roman Catholics claim not to be worshipping statues when they bow before them (they call it veneration—*dulia*—not worship—*latría*). The Second Commandment condemns giving religious honor or veneration to any graven image by bowing down to it all—not simply worshipping a false god. It matters not whether it is a statue or a portrait—God forbids all such religious veneration of the creature. And to make things worse, prayers are uttered before these graven images and to the saints represented by these graven images (this is idolatry).

D. Peter then makes it clear that God had showed him by way of the vision of the unclean animals that the Lord had torn down the wall that separated Jews and Gentiles contained in the ceremonies, feast days, and dietary laws of the Old Covenant (Acts 10:29; Ephesians 2:14-15). Let me make it clear that when the Lord tears down the wall of ceremonial and dietary laws of the Old Covenant, He does not tear down the wall of His Moral Law summarized in the Ten Commandments (Matthew 5:17-19). Peter then asks Cornelius why he has sent for him (Acts 10:29).

E. Cornelius relates to Peter firsthand the vision God had given to him in which God commanded Cornelius to send for Peter, and Cornelius immediately obeyed (Acts 10:30-33). Cornelius did not delay to obey to a more convenient time. He did not procrastinate. He “immediately” obeyed, because the authority of God was behind that command. That is all we need to obey.

F. Dear ones, I know not of a more accurate statement as to why you must gather to hear the Word of God preached and how you should gather to hear the Word of God preached than what you find here uttered by Cornelius: “Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God” (Acts 10:33).

1. You are in the presence of God when His Word is preached by His minister. You have not gathered to hear the words of a man, nor his jokes, nor even his own testimony.

2. You are gathered and seated here to hear God speak unto you by His Word and Spirit through a mere earthen vessel. When you forget this truth, the preaching of God Word will not change or transform you—preaching will only entertain you. But when you gather to hear God’s Word preached as waiting in the presence of God, you will glorify and exalt God, and you will be fed, taught, and instructed by His Spirit.

Finally, we only know that we have truly learned what we have been taught when we practice it in our thoughts, speech, and conduct. Where we are forgetful hearers rather than effectual doers, we evidence that our learning is just academic. Dear ones, this is dangerous (Titus 1:16). Peter and Cornelius not only received the revelation and truth of God, but they practiced it and applied it by faith. And Peter shows to us once again that even in the life of a Christian, we will fail to apply the truth perfectly at all times in our life (Galatians 2:11-18). And even when we fall, faith in Christ is evidenced by godly sorrow, looking to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and endeavoring new obedience.

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