

Peter & Cornelius: A Deeper Look

Acts 10

Introduction:

1. Acts 10 tells the story of a Gentile man by the name of Cornelius who, along with his entire household, trusts Christ.
2. This is a very significant event in God's Word and will provide a bridge from the apostle Peter to the apostle Paul. It will also provide a bridge from God's kingdom program for the nation of Israel to the dispensation of grace today.
 - Paul is sent home to Tarsus in Acts 9:30, but then shows up again in Acts 11:25.
 - Peter dominates the early part of Acts. Acts 1-12
 - Paul dominates the middle and latter part of Acts. Acts 13-28
 - Wedged in between the time that Paul was sent home and the time he showed up again is this event that involves Peter and Cornelius.
3. God knew that the apostle Paul would be the apostle to the Gentiles, but the church at Jerusalem would never have accepted this change in program if initiated by Paul.
4. God used Peter to open the door for Paul's great ministry to the Gentiles. This is why this is such a significant event in the Bible. We examined this story on the surface in a previous message.
5. It is so crucial to our understanding of God's Word that we need to delve into this text a bit deeper and answer several key questions.

First, was Cornelius a lost Gentile or a saved Jewish proselyte?

1. The Bible describes the character of this man Cornelius in our text (vs. 2, 22, 30). He was a devout man who believed in Israel's God, gave alms to the poor, and fasted and prayed to God.
2. Does this mean that Cornelius was already saved? Had he already received forgiveness of sins and eternal life? Absolutely not, and for the following reasons:
 - God instructed him to send for Peter so that he might know what to do, and the words whereby he could be saved. 10:4-6, 11:14
 - When Peter began to talk to Cornelius and his house, he instructed them as to how they could receive remission of sins. 10:43
 - Cornelius did not know about Jesus Christ and had not received the Holy Spirit. 10:36-44
 - After this event in Acts 10, when Peter explained it to the church at Jerusalem, they glorified God, saying, "*Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*" 11:18
3. There are some who teach that Cornelius was a Gentile who had been proselytized into Judaism in some manner.
 - Scripture knows of only one kind of proselyte, and that is a Gentile who believed in Israel's God, submitted to the Jewish rite of circumcision, and who also adhered to Israel's Mosaic Law.

- Cornelius did not meet the Scriptural criteria of a proselyte. Peter called him “*one of another nation*” and considered him a Gentile. 10:45; 11:1, 3
 - Cornelius was a Gentile who believed in God and did many good things, but he was lost and needed Christ.
4. Then what did Peter mean when he said, “...*in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him?*” 10:35
- This simply means that no longer would God-fearing Gentiles be cut off from God’s favor because of their uncircumcision.
 - Peter had thought that only the Jews were acceptable to God and could be saved at that point. The Gentiles were unclean, but God showed Peter that He would be no respecter of persons, and Jews and Gentiles would be on level ground.
 - If Gentiles believed in God and desired God’s truth, they would be accepted in the sense that they were no longer on the outside of God’s plans looking in. They could also be included in God’s family and God’s plans. No longer would they be considered “*unclean.*”
 - But they could not be saved and forgiven of their sins until they placed their faith in Christ. This is why Paul would launch out into Gentile territories and preach the gospel.
5. Lesson learned: Good works and believing in God cannot impart the power to save us and bring forgiveness of our sins. Only faith in Christ can do that.

Second, did Peter understand the revelation of the mystery and dispensation of grace when he went to meet Cornelius?

1. It is crucial that the Bible student understand that, up to this point, there had been no knowledge given to Peter or the twelve about God postponing His kingdom/prophetic program for Israel and ushering in the dispensation of grace.
2. This is why Peter was reluctant to go into a Gentile’s house. The prophetic program called for the conversion of Israel **first**, and then the blessing would flow from them to all nations, and they would make disciples of all nations.
3. Peter’s commission was a departure from the prophetic order (Acts 3:25-26). The revelation of the mystery of the one new body in Christ and the dispensation of grace would come later through the apostle Paul.
4. Consider these facts:
 - Peter did not go to Cornelius’ house as a result of a previous “commission,” but rather it took a special commission from God.
 - In the case of Cornelius, we read for the first time that God had put “no difference” between the Jew and the Gentile. It took a special vision from God to get Peter to understand this. 10:10-16
 - When Peter arrived at Cornelius’ house, he didn’t know what to say or do. He knew that God had sent him there, but he had no idea as to why (10:28-29). It was only after Cornelius’ testimony that he began to share God’s truth with them.

- When Peter preached, he did not present the cross as a blessed accomplishment as Paul later would (10:38-39). He presented it just as he did to Israel in early Acts.
 - Peter and his fellow Jewish brethren were astonished when the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit (10:44-45), and his only defense to the church was, “*What was I, that I could withstand God?*” This wasn’t something that had been previously revealed to Peter and that he was expecting.
11:17
5. All of these facts clearly reveal that the dispensation of grace and the revelation of the mystery (Jews and Gentiles reconciled in one body) had not been revealed yet.
 6. These divine truths would be revealed to Paul (the apostle to the Gentiles), and this event would pave the way for Paul to begin his great Gentile ministry and begin to share these precious truths with the church.
 7. It was on the basis of Peter’s ministry to Cornelius that Paul’s Gentile ministry would later be officially recognized.