

Hey Pete! Why So Reluctant to Go to the Gentiles? (Part 1)

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?

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

Third, was it because of Peter's rebellion and disobedience that he did not want to go to Cornelius house?

1. Some have accused Peter of being a prejudiced bigot who knew he should have been going to the Gentiles all along, but needed a kick in the seat of the pants by God to go.
2. This is extremely unfair and unkind to Peter. When we fail to rightly divide God's Word and understand the unfolding of God's purpose and plan of the dispensation of grace through Paul, we can arrive at some very unscriptural and unkind conclusions.
3. A casual reading of the first nine chapters of the book of Acts presents a man in Peter who is God's man and who is sold out to his Savior.
 - We see Peter preaching boldly to the ones who had just crucified Christ. Acts 2
 - We see Peter doing incredible miracles through God's help and power. Acts 3, 5:12-16

- We see Peter standing up boldly against Israel's leadership, being imprisoned, and his life threatened. Acts 4, 5:17-42
 - We see Peter actually raising a lady from the dead after praying to God. Acts 9:36-43
 - When God gave Peter the vision about Cornelius, Peter was praying. Acts 10:9
4. This is not the heart of a prideful, stubborn, and rebellious man!
 5. Peter was a man who was working tirelessly for the repentance and restoration of Israel so that she might be a channel of blessing to the world. He knew that the conversion of Israel must take place first, and this is why Christ instructed the apostles to begin at Jerusalem.
 6. Peter was eager that the "great commission" might get under way so that the good news of the kingdom might be sent to all nations. He was, in fact, hungering for the Gentiles to hear the good news of Christ and the kingdom. Acts 3:25-26
 7. Does this sound like a man prejudiced against the salvation of the Gentiles? When you read Acts 11:18, 11:23, and 15:3, you see that there was genuine rejoicing among Jewish believers when Gentiles were saved.
 8. What Peter did not understand was why God would have him go to Gentiles while Israel was still unconverted. This was a purpose involving the mystery of God's dispensation of grace which was hidden in the mind of God. This information had not been made public yet.
 9. We look back with 20/20 hindsight and wonder how Peter could miss it, but we forget that the Bible is a book of progressive revelation. Peter didn't have all the information we have today. He was operating based on what Christ had revealed up to that point.
 10. Paul had just been saved in Acts 9 and was waiting in Tarsus. None of the glorious truths for the dispensation of grace that God would give to Paul had been revealed yet.
 11. When the time came for God to send Peter to Cornelius' house, Christ didn't appear to Peter and say, "Hey Pete, remember what I told you? Get with the program!" He also didn't point Peter to an Old Testament passage to convince him.
 - It was by a special vision and special divine revelation that God got Peter to Cornelius' house.
 - Why? Because there was **nothing to point back to** that would have taught Peter to go to the Gentiles **before** Israel's conversion. Yes, Peter knew that Gentiles would ultimately be converted, but it would be **through** Israel, not **in spite of** Israel.

Fourth, why was Peter so vehemently opposed to eating the meats that God told him to eat?

1. When the sheet descended from heaven with all of the various animals in it, there came a voice that said, "*Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.*" 10:13

2. Peter obviously knew that this was a vision from the Lord (10:14), yet he responds, “*Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.*”
3. Peter had no clue as to what this vision meant (10:17). He was probably thinking, “Was this a test from the Lord? Is there some hidden, secret meaning to this vision?”
4. As saved Gentiles, we are reading this today, thinking, “What’s the big deal, Pete? Dive in, and enjoy. All meats are created by God to be received with thanksgiving. *For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused ...*”
5. But we must be careful that we don’t read future revelation into the story. Peter, the twelve, and all the church were still law-observing Jews. This included a strict prohibition against eating unclean meat. Leviticus 20:25
6. This was the Law of Moses and could not be taken lightly. To disregard it would be a serious matter. When Christ trained the twelve, never did He indicate that they were no longer to observe the Mosaic Law.
 - Christ kept the law in totality.
 - Christ instructed His followers to “*observe and do*” all that the scribes and Pharisees commanded because they occupied Moses’ seat of authority.
 - In some of His last words to the apostles, Christ told them that they would ultimately make disciples of all nations, “*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*” This included the Law of Moses.
7. As you read the early part of Acts, it is clear that the disciples were not striving to start a religious sect separate from Judaism. They were the **true** Israelites who had accepted Christ as their Messiah and faithfully observed the law.
 - There would be no revelation to the law being done away with until it was given through Paul.
8. So, naturally, Peter was quite perplexed. He knew there had to be some meaning other than God giving him permission to break one of the law’s commands.
9. While Peter was scratching his head, two things happened that brought clarity to this.
 - There came a knock at the door, and there stood three Gentile men asking for Peter. 10:17
 - The Holy Spirit informed Peter that God had sent these men, and instructed him to go with them. 10:19-22