

Hey Pete! Why So Reluctant to Go to the Gentiles? (Part 2)

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?

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

Fifth, why did Peter consider it unlawful for him to keep company with Gentiles?

1. As soon as Peter entered Cornelius' house, before he even inquired as to what they wanted, he let them know that it was an *"unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation..."* 10:28
2. What did Peter mean by such a statement? In what sense was it unlawful? Was there a prohibition against this in Israel's law?
 - The Jews were not to eat the *"unclean"* meats that Gentiles ate. Leviticus 20:25
 - The Jews were not to make covenants with Gentiles. Deuteronomy 7:2

- The Jews were not to intermarry with Gentiles. Deuteronomy 7:3; Ezra 9:2
3. So, there was certainly a line of separation that existed between Israel and the heathen nations. This was designed to protect Israel from learning the ways of the heathen, and to draw a clear contrast for the nations to see clearly the true God of Israel.
 4. But, there was no explicit law stating that the Jews could not interact with Gentiles. In fact, they were not prohibited from doing business with them, and they were to treat them kindly if they came in their midst. Leviticus 19:33-34
 5. So, why did Peter consider it unlawful to even meet with these Gentiles? I believe there were several factors at work:
 - It was definitely culturally taboo for a law-observing, orthodox Jew to socialize with uncircumcised Gentiles. Even though it may not have explicitly stated this in the law, they felt that it violated the spirit of the law to interact socially with Gentiles.
 - But beyond this, Peter remembered the first commission he ever received from Christ in Matthew 10:5 which clearly said, *“Go not into the way of the Gentiles...”*
 - Christ himself kept aloof from the Gentiles during His earthly ministry. He interacted with a couple of Gentiles who approached Him, but made it clear in Matthew 15:24, *“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”*
 - This was not because of a lack of compassion or lack of love for the Gentiles, but because Christ recognized the divine plan of prophecy to send light to the Gentiles through redeemed Israel. Israel must first be saved before salvation would be sent to the Gentiles (Isaiah 60:1-5). This is why Christ said to the Gentile woman, *“Let the children first be filled.”*
 - After His resurrection, Christ did not change this prophetic and biblical plan. The apostles were to begin their commission in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. After Israel was converted and received Christ, disciples would be made of all nations.
 - In Acts 1:6, right before Christ’s ascension, the twelve are still fully anticipating the restoration of Israel’s kingdom. In Acts 3:25-26, Peter understood that Israel’s repentance and salvation would be the means through which the nations would be blessed.
 - By Acts 10, there were pockets of believers all throughout Israel and Samaria (northern Israel), but the nation was still, by and large, in rebellion, and the leadership of Israel still remained unconverted.
 - This is why the apostles remained in Jerusalem in Acts 8:1 despite the risk of being killed. They longed for the repentance of Israel’s leadership *“beginning at Jerusalem”* so that the good news of Christ could expand through redeemed Israel to the nations.
 6. With this background and understanding, it explains why Peter and the church at Jerusalem thought it *“unlawful”* to fellowship with Gentiles. According to the prophetic plan, Israel must be converted first.

- They were far from prejudiced against the Gentiles and, in fact, were quick to rejoice once they realized that God had overridden the prophetic plan, and saved these Gentiles despite Israel's rebellion. 11:18
7. We know now that God saved Paul in Acts 9 and would interrupt the prophetic program with the dispensation of the grace of God. Of course, Peter did not know any of this as of yet, which explains his reluctance to go to a Gentile's house.