

The Gentiles Receive the Gospel

Lesson Scope: Acts 9:32 to Acts 11:18

References in brackets refer to Acts 9 to 11 unless otherwise specified

Lesson Focus

Prior to the events of this lesson, the church cantered on the Jewish people and Jerusalem. Now this chapter opens a new phase in God's plan for the Gospel: the Gentiles would also be included.

In order to bring about these changes, God revealed His purposes to Peter in a very special vision. The vision of unclean animals was one an Old Testament worshiper could easily understand. Peter's response revealed his deep commitment to Jewish practices. God was using this vision to prepare Peter for his encounter with Cornelius.

The redemptive work of Jesus Christ is sufficient for all mankind. Everyone who conforms to the Gospel conditions shall be saved, regardless of nationality or heritage.

The purpose of this lesson is to show that all who meet the requirements can be saved, and to show what these requirements are. These New Testament requirements are starkly different from those of the Old Testament. Try to help everyone realize how hard it was for Peter and the others in this lesson to change their thinking. Peter had been taught all his life not to eat unclean animals. Not only was it what he had been taught, but it was the law of Almighty God. No wonder he refused to eat! We would also find it hard to change.

Be careful how you discuss the subject of a godly background. On the one hand, a godly background is of no merit before God. On the other hand, it can be a great blessing and is something to be very thankful for. What matters most is that "he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (10:35).

Lesson Aim: To show the basis for inclusion in Gospel privileges.

Theme Verses: Acts 10:34-35. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Lesson Text

The Way Prepared

Acts 10:9-22

⁹ (KJV) 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 enquiry 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. ²¹ Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what *is* the cause wherefore ye are come? ²² And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.

The Gospel Declared

Acts 10:30-36

³⁰ (KJV) 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. ³³ 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 are 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. ³⁶ The word which *God* sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all)

The Gentiles Received

Acts 10:44 ⁴⁴ (KJV) While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

Acts 10:48 ⁴⁸ (KJV) And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Acts 11:2-4 ² (KJV) And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, ³ Saying, Thou went 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,

Acts 11:15-18 ¹⁵ (KJV) 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.

Questions for Study

The Way Prepared

1. Why did Peter refuse to eat the animals?
2. Of what character was Cornelius?
3. Is a godly background needed for salvation? Is it of any benefit?

The Gospel Declared

4. In what ways is God no respecter of persons?
5. How could we be guilty of respect of persons?

The Gentiles Received

6. What was the evidence that God had accepted the Gentiles?
7. How can we know if we are filled with the Spirit today?

Analysing the Passage

Trance (10:10) refers not to a dream, but to an absorbed and abstract state of mind. Common (10:14) refers to unholy or ceremonially unclean objects. The four corners (10:11) symbolize all-inclusiveness, as does the presence of all manner of beasts (10:12). The fact that the vision was repeated three times (10:16) implies a special emphasis.

Cornelius was a centurion in the Roman army. This was a position of rank and authority. But he was exceptional in that he feared God.

Peter's trance took place about the sixth hour, or midday, on the housetop. Houses of this time period had flat roofs, which were a common place of retreat. Peter's original intention was to pray while the meal was prepared.

Principles and Applications

The Way Prepared

1. God designed the plan and method for Gospel privileges (10:9-16). Salvation for Jew and Gentile was God's plan from the beginning. Now it was His time to reveal this plan to the early church. To reject God's plan is to reject salvation.
2. To be a recipient of Gospel privileges requires divine cleansing (10:15). All have sinned and are in need of a Saviour. All must be cleansed by Christ's blood. There is no class of people so good that they do not need cleansing, nor any class of people so wicked that they cannot be cleansed.
3. Those who fear God align themselves to be recipients of Gospel privileges (10:22). The fear of God is foundational to salvation. Without it man does not recognize the guilt of sin and his accountability before God. The fear of God helps one realize his need of obedience and the consequences of disobedience.

The Gospel Declared

4. True worship is basic to receiving and enjoying Gospel privileges

(10:30). Worship brings man into God's presence. The attitudes that surround worship are also core aspects of receiving the Gospel: humility before God, veneration of Christ as Lord, and dedication of one's life to Him.

5. Continued openness to truth is necessary to receive Gospel privileges (10:33). If one has no intention of obeying Christ, he cannot receive salvation. This is because a core aspect of salvation is not merely removing the penalty of sin, but actually removing sin from a person's life. If we love God, we will want to obey Him. "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

6. God accepts all who meet the Bible requirements for salvation (10:34-36). The Gospel is for all: Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, and man or woman. Race and background do not matter. God is no respecter of persons. We may be tempted to think that some individuals are too coarse and hardened to be reached with the Gospel. We could assume that others have such an easy and pleasant life that they will not sense their need of Christ. But such thinking is distorted. God does not give up on us, and we should not give up on others.

The Gentiles Received

7. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is a sign of enjoying Gospel privileges (10:44-46). The Spirit is for all believers. His work will be evident. The fruit of the Spirit will continually be manifest in the life of the believer, producing a bond of love that can overcome natural differences between believers.

8. Believing in the Lord Jesus is the basis for receiving Gospel privileges (11:17). Christ makes the provision of salvation possible. To reject Christ is to reject the Saviour of the world, the Head of the church, and the Word of Life. Many people claim to believe there is a God. Sadly, far fewer believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. And even fewer possess a saving faith in Christ that results in obedience. Without this, one cannot access Gospel privileges.

9. Those who receive the Gospel bring glory to God through a life of repentance (11:18). Repentance and amendment of life are a living testimony of God's power. God saves man not only from the guilt of sin but also from the power of sin. The world will notice this and be reminded of God.

Important Teachings

1. God designed the plan and method for Gospel privileges (10:9-16).
2. To be a recipient of Gospel privileges requires divine cleansing (10:15).
3. Those who fear God align themselves to be recipients of Gospel privileges (10:22).
4. True Worship is basic to receiving and enjoying Gospel privileges (10:30).
5. Continued openness to truth is necessary to receive Gospel privileges (10:33).
6. God accepts all who meet the Bible requirements for salvation (10:34-36).
7. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is a sign of enjoying Gospel privileges (10:44-46).
8. Believing in the Lord Jesus is the basis for receiving Gospel privileges (11:17).
9. Those who receive the Gospel bring glory to God through a life of repentance.
10. To enjoy Gospel privileges requires identity with Christ and His body by water baptism (10:47—48).
11. Those who receive the Gospel will be observed by others (11:2, 4, 15).

Answers to Questions

1. Why did Peter refuse to eat the animals?
There were unclean animals in the vessel, and the Law forbade eating unclean animals.
2. Of what character was Cornelius?
Cornelius was devout. He feared God, gave alms, and prayed always. He was a just man and of good report.
3. Is a godly background needed for salvation? Is it of any benefit?
A God-fearing background is not required to experience salvation. God is no respecter of persons, regardless of background. A godly background can be a great blessing and help. Children raised in a godly home benefit from knowing the Scriptures, receiving discipline, and developing wholesome habits.
4. In what ways is God no respecter of persons?

God loves everyone the same, and salvation is available for all. Race, nationality, gender, economic status, and background do not matter.

5. How could we be guilty of respect of persons?

We may be tempted to think some individuals are so low in sin that they will never come to God. We could also think that other individuals are living such a good life that they would never sense their need of God. We may assume that individuals like us are more likely to be Christian. We may tend to question the sincerity of those who differ with us. All of these indicate respect of persons.

6. What was the evidence that God had accepted the Gentiles?

The Holy Ghost fell on them, and they spoke with tongues.

7. How can we know if we are filled with the Spirit today?

The fruit of the Spirit is evidence of the work of the Spirit in one's life. The Spirit will produce brotherly love within the church. The Spirit will help brethren to overcome natural differences.

Summarizing the Lesson

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

What a blessing; the Gospel is for all! God accepts all who repent and believe in Him. May we be willing to tell the Gospel story to all men.

Research Guide

1. See “Cornelius” in Unger’s Bible Dictionary.
2. Study Scriptures that relate to unclean animals: Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.