

# Breaking Down Barriers

Acts 10:24-38

SS Lesson for 10/18/2015

**Devotional Scripture:** Eph 2:11-22

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# Introduction

## Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews how God desires His people to work toward **Breaking Down Barriers** between people so that all will come to the knowledge and acceptance of God through the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The **study's aim** is to understand that God does not show favoritism to people who are a different ethnic or racial origin. The **study's application** is to grow in love for people regardless of their ethnic or racial origin and to have a goal of sharing God and Jesus Christ with all who asks.

*(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)*

## Key Verse: Acts 10:34-35

*34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.*

## Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

That **Peter** prayed morning and evening may be assumed, for those were normal times of prayer. In addition he prayed at **noon**. Prayer three times a day was not commanded in the Scriptures, but Peter followed the example of pious men before him (cf. Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10). Peter **went up to the (flat) roof to pray**; this would have given him privacy. While **hungry**, Peter **fell into a trance** in which God gave him a vision of a **sheet coming down to earth with all kinds of... animals... reptiles... and birds**. When God commanded **Peter** to **eat** of these animals, his response was, **Surely not, Lord!** Significantly his refusal ("surely not") was *mēdamōs*, a more polite and subjective term than *oudamōs* ("by no means," used only in Matt. 2:6). This was the third time in Peter's career that he directly refused God's will (cf. Matt. 16:23; John 13:8). **Peter** knew from the Law that he should not eat **unclean** animals (Lev. 11). But could he not have killed and **eaten** the clean animals and left the unclean? Probably Peter understood the command to include them all. Or possibly the large sheet contained only unclean animals. **Do not call anything impure that God has made clean**. This rebuttal gives Mark 7:14-23 more meaning (cf. 1 Tim. 4:4). It is generally recognized that Mark wrote down Peter's words. In retrospect Peter must have recognized that Jesus as the Messiah cleansed all goods from ceremonial defilement. Why did Peter refuse **three times** to eat the unclean foods? For one thing, this indicated emphasis. But more than that it revealed certainty and truth. Here was one place where Peter was being scrupulous beyond the will of God. His intentions were good, but he was being disobedient. Also, was there some link here with Peter's threefold denial (John 18:17, 25-27) and with his three affirmations of his love for the Lord? (John 21:15-17).

In marvelous timing and by the coordination of the sovereign God the three messengers and **Peter** met. **The Holy Spirit**, who told Peter about the arrival of the **three men**, may have been the One whose unidentified voice Peter heard earlier (vv. 13, 15). **The men... from Cornelius** spoke highly of him (cf. vv. 2, 4) and conveyed to **Peter** their purpose in coming. **Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests**. Since Peter had been waiting for his noon meal (cf. v. 10), he undoubtedly now shared it with his visitors. Perhaps he was already beginning to discern the lesson of his vision! By the time **Peter** and his guests finished lunch it must have been too late to start back to Caesarea that day. **The next day** they began the almost-two-day trip. (Cornelius' emissaries had left Caesarea after 3 P.M. one day [vv. 3, 8] and arrived at noon two days later [vv. 9, 19]. Cf. "four days ago" in v. 30.) Peter took with him **some of the brothers from Joppa**. The two-by-two motif is common in the Gospels and Acts; Christian workers often went out by twos. In this debatable situation at least six people accompanied Peter (11:12). So there would be seven witnesses to attest to what would transpire. **Cornelius** was so confident that Peter would come and he was so expectant of Peter's message that he **called together his relatives and close friends**. When **Peter** arrived, **Cornelius** prostrated himself before the apostle in worship. The verb *prosekynēsen* means "he worshiped" and is here translated **in reverence**. **Peter**, refusing this kind of obeisance, urged

Cornelius to **stand up**, for, **he said, I am only a man myself. Peter** was well aware of the consequences of his fellowshiping with Gentiles in their homes (cf. 11:2-3), but he had learned the lesson of the vision well. The command to eat unclean animals meant he was **not to call any man impure or unclean**. So he **came without** protest. After **Cornelius** recounted the circumstances that brought **Peter** to his house he said, **Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us**. What a divinely prepared audience! These words of **Peter** were revolutionary. They swept away the prejudice and indoctrination of generations of Judaism. However, Gentile salvation certainly was a doctrine known in the Old Testament (cf. Jonah; Gen. 12:3). In the Old Testament the Jews were God's Chosen People, the special recipients of His promises and revelation. Here Peter stated that God's program was reaching out to the world through the church. There is considerable debate about Peter's words that God **accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right**. This does not teach salvation by works because a person's first responsibility before God is to fear Him, which is tantamount to trusting Him and reverencing Him. It is the New Testament parallel to Micah 6:8. Furthermore, God's acceptance of such people refers to His welcoming them to a right relationship by faith in Christ (cf. Acts 11:14). Peter then outlined the career of **Christ** (vv. 36-43), the sovereign **Lord of all**, through whom **God sent... the good news of peace**. Bible students have often observed how this parallels the Gospel of Mark almost perfectly. Mark began with John's **baptism** and traced the ministry of the Lord Jesus from **Galilee to Judea** to Jerusalem and finally to the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and the Great Commission. The word *Messiah* means "Anointed One"; so when Peter said, **God anointed Jesus of Nazareth** he was saying, "God declared Him the Messiah" (cf. Isa. 61:1-3; Luke 4:16-21; Acts 4:27). This declaration occurred at the Lord's baptism (cf. Matt. 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-34). Isaiah spoke of the Anointed One performing great deeds (Isa. 61:1-3), and as Peter declared, **He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil**. Peter affirmed that he and his associates were personal eyewitnesses of all Jesus **did**, that is, **the Jews... killed Him by hanging Him on a tree**, an ignominious form of execution. Earlier Peter had told Jews **in Jerusalem**, "You killed the Author of life" (3:15); to the rulers he said, "You crucified" Him (4:10); and to the Sanhedrin he replied, "You killed" Him "by hanging Him on a tree" (5:30). And Stephen too told the Sanhedrin, "You... have murdered Him" (7:52). On five occasions in Acts, the apostles said they were **witnesses** of the resurrected Christ (2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:41; 13:30-31). After Christ's resurrection the disciples **ate and drank with Him** (cf. John 21:13). This was proof that the resurrected Lord Jesus was no bodiless phantom and it explains how Christ was **seen** (Acts 10:40). Peter made it clear that Christ's ministry results either in judgment (v. 42) or salvation (v. 43). The key phrase is, **Everyone who believes in Him**. This Greek construction consists of a present participle with an article, which is almost the equivalent of a noun (in this case "every believer in Him"). The key element in salvation is faith, belief in Christ. This message of **forgiveness of sins** (cf. 2:38; 5:31; 13:38; 26:18) **through** faith in the Messiah was spoken of by the prophets (e.g., Isa. 53:11; Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25-26).

## **Lesson Introduction and Background**

### **From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

The number 42 became famous for its key role in the popular novel *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. But sports fans associate that number with a real-world figure: Jackie Robinson (1919-1972). Wearing number 42 while playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, Robinson became major-league baseball's very first rookie of the year. More significantly, he became the first African-American to play major league baseball in the modern era. That fact brought with it racial slurs and physical abuse during Robinson's playing career. His success as a player spoke for itself, but his skill on the field never seemed to make him immune from racial hostility. One of his more famous sayings epitomizes his responses to these challenges: "I'm not concerned with your liking or disliking me; all I ask is that you respect me as a human being." Robinson's memory now has that respect, and in 1997 the number 42 became the first player-number to be retired officially by an entire professional league—no major league baseball team allows any player to wear that number today. The exception is April 15 of each year, when every player walks onto the diamond wearing number 42. Robinson was not alone in breaking baseball's color barrier. Branch Rickey, general manager and part owner of the

Dodgers, had been looking for prospects within the “Negro League” for several years, seeking a player who could both perform well on the field and handle the intense pressure that would come with the position. His determination to eliminate segregation in baseball gave Robinson his opportunity. Lesson for October 4th highlighted the first-century church’s crossing of a racial and cultural divide; today’s lesson involves another such crossing as salvation through Jesus was extended to Gentiles in the historic meeting between Peter and Cornelius. The shock waves that resulted from that meeting have reverberated across the centuries—and still do.

Today’s passage is an excerpt from a longer story that extends from Acts 10:1 to 11:18. The length of this episode, about 6.2 percent of the book of Acts, reflects its significance as a major turning point in spiritual—even world—history. Just before his ascension, Jesus declared that the apostles would be his witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The apostles didn’t seem to comprehend this to mean extension of the gospel to Gentiles, given the surprise expressed in Acts 10:45; 11:18. As observant Jews, the apostles had been brought up to view Gentiles as unclean pagans, who might endanger the apostles’ own religious and moral purity. As such, the apostles probably interpreted Christ’s words in Matthew 28:19, 20 and Acts 1:8 geographically rather than ethnically: surely Jesus meant that they were to preach to Jews who lived in all nations. A divine correction to this misunderstanding was needed! That correction began with two visions that occurred about 21 hours apart: the first to a Roman centurion named Cornelius (Acts 10:1-6) and the second to the apostle Peter (10:9-16). The respective locations were the cities of Caesarea Maritima and Joppa, about 30 miles apart, on the Mediterranean coastline. Before his vision, Cornelius had developed a reputation of being “a righteous and God-fearing man, . . . respected by all the Jewish people” (10:22). There is no indication, however, that Cornelius had fully converted to Judaism. Luke (the author of Acts) refers to individuals like Cornelius as “God-fearing” or “who worship God” (Acts 10:2; 13:16, 26) and/or being “devout” (10:2), in contrast with those who had converted to Judaism fully (2:11; 6:5; 13:43). Even so, God, recognizing the sincerity of Cornelius’s faith, chose this man to be the starting point for extending the gospel to Gentiles. God’s initiative began when he sent an angel to Cornelius to tell him to send for Peter (10:3-8). At the time Peter received his own vision, he had “stayed in Joppa for some time” (Acts 9:43). Peter had been summoned there on behalf of a dead woman for whom he performed a resurrection (9:36-41). One day he became hungry while praying on a rooftop (10:9, 10), and that’s when he experienced a strange vision of “a large sheet” being lowered from Heaven (10:11). The sheet was filled with all kinds of unclean creatures, whose meat was not to be eaten according to Leviticus 11. Three times a voice from Heaven told Peter to “kill and eat” (Acts 10:13, 16); Peter insisted each time that he could not do so, stressing that he had “never eaten anything impure or unclean” (10:14). The voice responded each time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (10:15). Although Jesus had declared “all foods clean” (Mark 7:19), nobody at the time seemed to realize the significance of this pronouncement in setting aside the dietary laws. So Peter had continued to adhere to them. Thus Peter was troubled by the experience. What could it mean? The answer came quickly as the delegation from Cornelius arrived while Peter was still pondering (Acts 10:17). Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Peter agreed to accompany them back to their master’s house (10:19-23). The company of 10—Peter, “six brothers” (11:12; see next week’s lesson), and the delegation of “three men” from Cornelius (10:19)—remained the night before setting out for Caesarea Maritima (10:23).

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Breaking Barriers by Meeting Face to Face (Acts 10:24-27)**

24 And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.

25 As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.

26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man."

27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.

## **Gathering family and friends (24)**

*Gathering to involve all in the sphere of influence (Deut 16:11)*

11 And rejoice before the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name — you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns, and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows living among you.

*Gathering to get teaching (Mic 4:2)*

2 Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

*Gathering to seek God (Zech 8:21)*

21 and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.'

*Gathering to tell others about God and His blessings (Mark 5:18-20)*

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19 Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

## **Realizing all are equal (25-26)**

*Equal but some can give interpretations for understanding (Dan 2:30)*

30 As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

*Equal but some can bring good news (Acts 14:11-15)*

11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: 15 "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.

*Equal fellow servants (Rev 19:10)*

10 At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

## **Be in unity of purpose (27)**

*Unity of the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:3-6)*

3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

*Unity through the Church (Eph 4:11-13)*

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

*Unity through love (Col 3:14)*

14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

*Unity in Christ (Phil 2:1-4)*

2 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

***Breaking Barriers by Applying God's Truths (Acts 10:28-29)***

28 Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

29 Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"

**Accept God's truths (28)**

*Accept God's truths and His works (Ps 77:12)*

12 I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.

*Accept God's truths and His ways (Ps 143:5)*

5 I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done.

*Accept God's truths in worship (Ps 48:9)*

9 Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love.

*Accept God's truths by thinking on them (Phil 4:8)*

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.

**Obey God's truths (29)**

*Obey God's truths because God hates lying and dishonesty (Zech 8:16-17)*

16 These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; 17 do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the Lord.

*Obey God's truths because it's the only way to be in fellowship with God (Ps 15:1-2)*

15 Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? 2 He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart

*Obey God's truths because we are members of one body in Christ (Eph 4:25)*

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

*Obey God's truths because in truth there is freedom (John 8:32)*

32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

*Obey God's truths because it brings peace with God (Phil 4:7-9)*

7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

### ***Breaking Barriers by Prayer and Guidance (Acts 10:30-33)***

30 So 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, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God.

32 Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.'

33 So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God."

### **Consistently pray (30-31)**

*Pray about everything (Phil 4:6-7)*

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

*Pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17)*

17 pray continually;

*Pray while suffering (James 5:13)*

13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

*Pray for others (Rom 12:9-13)*

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

*Pray in the Spirit (Eph 6:17-18)*

17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

## **Listen and follow God's guidance (32-33)**

### *Guidance into obedience through imitation (Eph 5:1-2)*

5 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

### *Guidance into obedience through suffering (1 Peter 2:21)*

21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

### *Guidance into truth (John 16:13-15)*

13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

### *Guidance by the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:18)*

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

### *Guidance into insight (Ps 119:99-100)*

99 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. 100 I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

## **Breaking Barriers By Teaching the Gospel (Acts 10:34-38)**

34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.

35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

36 The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ--He is Lord of all--  
37 that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:

38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

## **Facts about God and partiality (34-36)**

### *God shows no partiality (Deut 10:17)*

17 For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.

### *God does not judge with partiality (2 Chron 19:7)*

7 Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Judge carefully, for with the Lord our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery."

### *God's ways do not have partiality (Luke 20:21)*

21 So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.

*God show no favoritism (Rom 2:11)*

11 For God does not show favoritism.

### **Facts about Jesus being Lord of all (37-38)**

*Jesus is Lord because all things came through Him (1 Cor 8:6)*

6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

*Jesus is Lord because the Holy Spirit testifies that He is (1 Cor 12:3)*

3 Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

*The Church is built on the fact that Jesus is Lord (Matt 16:16-18)*

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

*The angels agree that Jesus is Lord (Rev 17:14)*

14 They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings — and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

## **Conclusion and Other Thoughts**

### **Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh**

When the centurion pled with Jesus to heal his servant ([Luke 7:1-10](#)), Jesus set out on his way to this man's home. When Jesus was not far from his house, the centurion sent some of his servants to persuade Jesus not to come any further, but simply to heal his servant from a distance. Now why would anyone not want Jesus to be a guest in their home? The centurion knew all too well that Jews did not defile themselves by entering a Gentile home (compare [John 18:28](#)), so he made it easy for Jesus not to come any further. And in so doing, he demonstrated his great faith. He believed that Jesus could heal from a distance, because of His great authority. Cornelius was well aware of this matter of defilement as well, but he had been divinely instructed to invite Peter to his home. It was thus with a great sense of expectation that Cornelius waited for Peter's arrival, along with those friends and relatives he had summoned as well. When Peter arrived, Cornelius prostrated himself at the feet of Peter. Most translations indicate that Cornelius "**worshipped**" Peter. I am inclined to agree with the NIV, which says that he "**fell at his feet in reverence.**" I don't believe that Cornelius worshipped Peter as though he were God. I think he showed reverence for Peter as God's spokesman, as an apostle. I do find Peter's response to this reverential response most informative. Peter refuses to receive worship, and rightly so. When Paul healed the lame man at Lystra, the people attempted to worship him, along with Barnabas. These two apostles fervently sought to put an end to such worship (see [Acts 14:8-18](#)). Herod received worship and seemed to enjoy it, and he died a terrible death as a result ([Acts 12:20-23](#)). Peter made it clear to Cornelius that he was but a mere man, and as such, Cornelius' act of reverence was not only uncalled for, but inappropriate. Those who would give men too much glory and reverence should listen carefully to the words of Peter. Going inside the house, Peter discovered that many had gathered in anticipation of his arrival. Peter began by explaining how it was that he was divinely directed to enter this Gentile home, in spite of his predisposition not to do so. Peter's words are both interesting and significant:

28 He said to them, "You know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, yet God has shown me that I should call no person defiled or ritually unclean. 29 Therefore when you sent for me, I came without any objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?" ([Acts 10:28-29](#))

I find it interesting that Peter believes it is unlawful for him to associate with or visit a Gentile (verse 28). As I read these words, I asked myself this question: “Just where does it say in the Old Testament Law that a Jew cannot associate with a Gentile by entering his home?” I then came upon this statement by A. T.

Robertson: But there is no O.T. regulation forbidding such social contact with Gentiles, though the rabbis had added it and had made it binding by custom. There is nothing more binding on the average person than social custom. I am therefore inclined to say that having social contact with a Gentile was not contrary to Old Testament law, but rather was a violation of Jewish tradition. One might be defiled by eating foods that were unclean, but we must remember that our Lord Jesus nullified these food laws:

14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand. 15 There is nothing outside of a person that can defile him by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles him.” 17 Now when Jesus had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 He said to them, “Are you so foolish? Don’t you understand that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him? 19 For it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and then goes out into the sewer.” ( **This means all foods are clean.**) 20 He said, “What comes out of a person defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the human heart, come evil ideas, sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, evil, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and folly. 23 All these evils come from within and defile a person” (Mark 7:14-23, emphasis mine).

Another thing that fascinates me is that Peter is now somehow able to grasp not only the principle, but also its application. I am reminded of the “old Peter” we find in Matthew. In chapter 14, Jesus feeds the 5,000, even though the disciples didn’t see how it was possible. In chapter 15, the disciples (which surely included Peter) could not seem to figure out how God could feed the 4,000, even after the feeding of the 5,000. In chapter 16, Jesus warned of the “**leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees**” (Matthew 16:6), and all the disciples could think about was literal bread. Only the Canaanite woman understood that bread was a symbol, and she grasped the spiritual meaning of Jesus’ words (Matthew 15:21-28). Now, Peter seems able to leap beyond the literal message conveyed in his dream (don’t call food unclean that God has made clean) to the deeper meaning – don’t call people unclean whom God has made clean:

He said to them, “You know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, yet God has shown me that I should call no person defiled or ritually unclean” (Acts 10:28).

But it went even beyond this. Peter was just now beginning to understand that God does not show partiality among those whom He saves (Acts 10:34-35). God broke down the old barriers that separated Jews and Gentiles, making one new man, one new entity, the church, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles. This was accomplished through the saving work of Jesus on the cross of Calvary (Ephesians 2:11-22). This truth was a mystery, revealed but not understood by Old Testament saints; it was a mystery God chose to unveil through the ministry of Paul and others (Ephesians 3:1-12). Peter now asks why Cornelius has sent for him. Cornelius repeats the story of how he received instructions from an angel to summon Peter. He tells Peter that they now eagerly await the word which he was commanded to bring to them. Peter begins his message by telling them what God has just taught him: God does not show partiality, but He saves both Jews and Gentiles by grace, through faith in the shed blood of Jesus on the cross of Calvary.

I have chosen to conclude this lesson here, because the focus has been on Peter and Cornelius. In the verses that follow, Peter will proclaim the gospel, Cornelius and those gathered will believe, the Spirit will baptize them, and then Peter’s Jewish colleagues in Jerusalem will object. That is another lesson. But for now, let us conclude by focusing on the lessons that we should learn from our text.

*First, we should observe from our text that it is God who prepares and changes men’s hearts.* In Acts 9, God prepared Saul for conversion in some rather dramatic ways. He also prepared the heart of Ananias for the task He had for him. Objections were divinely overcome; they were not set aside by debate or human efforts. In our text, we see God’s preparation of both Peter (the reluctant believer) and Cornelius. Peter was reluctant to associate with Gentiles, much less to take the gospel to them. God’s preparatory work in Peter’s heart was done just as the messengers sent by Cornelius arrived. Cornelius was reluctant to ask a Jew to enter his house

(just as the centurion in [Luke 7:1-10](#) had been), but God prepared him to obey and send for Peter, just as He prepared all in his house to believe the gospel Peter would proclaim. Our friend, Colin McDougall of Church of the Open Door, has rightly contended that we need to spend much more time in prayer for evangelism, asking God to prepare those for the gospel whom He will send our way. We should ask God to prepare our hearts so that we might perceive open hearts and proclaim Jesus. But we should also ask God to work in the hearts of those to whom we desire to speak. Prepared hearts respond to God's Word. Note, too, the perfection of God's timing in preparing hearts. God's perfect timing is evident in the conversion of the Ethiopian in chapter 8, of Saul in chapter 9, and of Cornelius and his guests in chapter 10. God's timing is frequently not ours, but His timing is perfect. When He sets out to do something, He prepares the way for it to happen, and He orchestrates every detail perfectly. Have you questioned God's timing, or God's ability to save? If so, I suggest that you meditate on these conversion accounts in Acts.

*Second, we should learn that prayer is a two-way conversation.* The Book of Acts has great lessons for us on the subject of prayer. When men and women pray in Acts, great things happen. What I see in our text is that God speaks to men when they are in prayer. Prayer is not just men and women speaking to God; prayer is God speaking to those who are listening to Him when they pray. In chapter 9, Paul's vision is apparently associated with Paul's prayer (see [Acts 9:11-12](#)). In chapter 10, Cornelius was in prayer when God spoke to him about sending for Peter.<sup>2</sup> Many of us spend all of our time talking to God, rather than listening for God to speak to us in some way. In my life, this is usually through thoughts that come to my mind. Sometimes it is insight into a passage that I'm thinking about, or praying about. Sometimes it is a thought about how to respond to a difficult situation. I have found that having a pencil and paper nearby is helpful when praying. Prayer is a two-way conversation.

*Third, we should observe that Peter has become a fulfilled Jew.* Consider how the argument of our text develops. First, we read about how God used Peter to heal Aeneas ([Acts 9:32-35](#)), and there is the account of the raising of Dorcas, who had died ([Acts 9:35-43](#)). In these two accounts, we see Peter performing miracles that remind us of miracles Jesus had performed. We even find a similarity in the words Peter employed and those Jesus used. In other words, Peter is acting and talking like Jesus. Years ago, I was preaching a sermon, and I said the word "God." As this word came out of my mouth, I realized that I had pronounced it just like one of my heroes, Dr. S. Lewis Johnson. Without even thinking about it, I had imitated Dr. Johnson. That is a compliment to Dr. Johnson. In our text, Peter was beginning to act and to talk like Jesus. This is exactly the way it should be.

*(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/perfecting-peter-acts-932-1048>)*

### **Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

A child growing up in a remote jungle looks up into the sky and wonders who made it. He has been told all his life about evil spirits that must be appeased, but he knows there must be more than sacrifices and blood and evil. The world around him has so much beauty. Where did it come from? His spirit longs to know his Creator. God says He made His "eternal power and Godhead" clearly seen in His creation so that "they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). Men and women and boys and girls around the world have enough truth all around them to understand that there is a Creator— Someone above humankind, Someone eternal. In every nation, as today's passage states, God has those who fear Him, who do right, and who are accepted by Him. What about those who have never met a Christian or a missionary? How can this verse be true if there are still people who have never heard of Jesus? A missionary couple grappled with such questions as they served in countries closed and hostile to the gospel. They met so many lost and knew there were many more they would never meet. What about the people in the remote tribes? How could God judge them as accountable if they had never heard the message of salvation? One day those missionaries read a verse in the Bible that answered their questions and gave them peace. It is Jeremiah 29:13—"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Oh, what peace it is to know God promises to be found by those who seek Him with all their heart! No matter how remote or how ensconced in false religion a person is, God will make a way. God is not limited by geography, culture, or false religion. This was shown to the missionary wife as she toured a Buddhist monastery, where every Buddhist male is required to spend two years of his life. As she

walked through the building, grieving for the lost state of the religious people in it, she was amazed to see on their library shelves among the other books a copy of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*! There, inside the monastery of a false religion, God had somehow placed His truth. As Psalm 9:10 states, "Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." As missionaries, believers, and evangelists, what is our responsibility in this? Should we forgo sharing the gospel because God will make a way regardless? God forbid! Rather, this should make us all the more eager to do His bidding. We may be sent to a person who is seeking God. We may be given the privilege of bringing the Word of the Lord to him. History has revealed times when missionaries arrived in remote, hidden villages deep in the jungles, where the people had been waiting for them, knowing that someday, someone would come to show them the way to God. It gives great hope to know that in every nation on this earth, God has those who long to know Him. And what a joy it is when we get to be part of the introduction! Those who go, those who give, and those who pray all have a part in finding seekers around the world and bringing them to Jesus. What part will you have?

***Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator***

1. No mere man is to be worshipped (Acts 10:24-26)
2. God's plan of salvation is for all people (vss. 27-29)
3. God will reveal Himself to those who seek Him (vss. 30-32)
4. God provides what we need in order to know Him better (vs. 33)
5. God accepts anyone who properly fears Him (vss. 34-35)
6. The gospel was initially given to the Jews, but Christ is Lord over the whole world (vs. 36)
7. Jesus had a special interest in helping and saving the lowly and the spiritually oppressed (vss. 37-38)