

Peter at Cornelius' House



Ice-Breaker

Did you grow up isolated from or associating with other ethnic groups? How much contact do you have with people from other ethnic groups today?



Scripture Passage

Acts 10:23-48

²³Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along. ²⁴The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

²⁷Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. ²⁹So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

³⁰Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³²Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' ³³So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

³⁴Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. ³⁶You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached-- ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹"We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen--by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶For they heard them speaking in tongues^a and praising God.

Then Peter said, ⁴⁷"Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." ⁴⁸So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

a [46] Or other languages



Bible Study

1. Given Peter's experience in verses 9-23 and what you know of Cornelius, how do you think each man was feeling as they greeted one another?
2. Jews regarded even people like Cornelius as pagans, unless they fully submitted to Jewish practices (see 11:3). Hence, what would verse 28 have meant to Cornelius? Why is the story of Cornelius so important in Acts (vv. 28,34-35,43)?
3. What is the main point in Peter's sermon? How does that compare with his sermons in 2:36-39 and 3:17-23? From these sermons, what do you see as central to the Gospel message?
4. In light of the astonished reaction of the Jews (v. 45), what did it mean that the Gentiles could speak in tongues? How does this reinforce Peter's private vision in 10:9-23?

Reference Notes

10:23 While Jews would offer Gentiles hospitality, they typically would refuse to accept it from the Gentiles lest they violate dietary laws. Assuming the messengers arrived in early afternoon (see v. 9), it would have been too late in the day to start the 30-mile journey back to Caesarea. **some of the brothers.** According to Acts 11:12, six others accompanied Peter to Caesarea. These believers may have been those converted because of the raising of Tabitha from the dead (see Acts 9:40-43). That they were called "brothers" reminds us of the sense of family that was developing among believers (see also Acts 9:17,30).

10:25 fell at his feet in reverence. Literally, "worshiped him." Cornelius was showing great deference to Peter, whom he regarded as a special messenger from God. Romans were used to showing such reverence to human beings, since the Caesars were considered divine.

10:26 But Peter made him get up. This was an action that Peter refused to allow since, as a Jew, he would believe that such respect was to be shown only to God (see also Paul's response in Acts 14:11-15). Perhaps this was a not too subtle way of cautioning Christian teachers and evangelists from taking too much glory or thinking too much of themselves when they saw the wonderful things that God could do through them.

10:28 it is against our law. Jews would not associate with Gentiles partly because of the problems associated with their dietary laws. To have such associations rendered the Jew ceremonially unclean and thus ineligible for worship at the temple until a length of time had passed and a prescribed ceremony of cleansing had been performed. Because Gentile food may have come from unclean animals or even from an animal that had been sacrificed as part of a pagan ritual, eating with them was especially taboo. However, it was also true that even traveling in Gentile territory was considered distasteful. When pious Jews would leave Gentile land, they often shook the dust from their feet, not wanting to take even the Gentiles' dust back to Israel. So severe did Jewish antipathy for Gentiles become that the standard prayer for the pious Jewish male had become, "Lord, I thank Thee that Thou has not created me a Gentile or a slave or a woman." Gentile. Literally, "people of another race." This word, used only here in the New Testament, is the least offensive way possible for Jews to refer to Gentiles, as opposed to the derogatory term in Acts 11:3 used by those upset with Peter. **But God has shown me.** Although the vision was about food, Peter caught on that its significance was about people. He can no longer consider Gentiles as unclean before God. In fact, he and other followers of Jesus had to open up their minds to all people, with the new understanding that all people are valuable to God and no one can lift themselves up as better than others. It is not one's culture or race or physical condition that makes a person "unclean," but rather things they

choose for themselvesÑsinful behavior and unbelief. Jesus had said that it was not what was on the outside that made a person unclean, but what was on the inside (see Matthew 23:25-26).

10:30-33 Cornelius tells Peter of his openness to hear the message of God that Peter has for him and his family (see Acts 11:14).

10:34 *Peter began to speak.* Literally, "opened his mouth." As in Acts 8:35, this phrase is a signal that an important statement is about to be made. ***God does not show favoritism.*** While this truth is firmly rooted in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 10:17; 2 Chronicles 19:7; Malachi 2:9), somehow the Jews by and large did not apply it to Gentiles.

10:35 *but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.* The important thing in relating to God is not one's nationality, but one's attitude. A sense of humility before the Creator and a desire to live in love and justice toward others are the key signs of faith (Micah 6:8; see also Romans 2). This does not mean that Cornelius or anyone else can earn salvation through moral effort, but that such effort coupled with a humble attitude shows that a person is trusting in God's mercy for forgiveness and life. The Gospel assures such a person that, on the basis of Jesus' death and resurrection, forgiveness and life are indeed given by God. Such a person's receptivity to the Gospel when it is heard is clear evidence of his or her acceptance by God.

10:36 *telling the good news of peace.* An allusion to Isaiah 52:7. In Jesus, God has fulfilled his promise of bringing about reconciliation and harmony between people and God (2 Corinthians 5:18). In this context, "peace" is synonymous with "salvation." Lord of all. While Peter has recognized Jesus as Lord for some time, the fact that he is the Lord of all peoples is a brand new realization for him.

10:37 *throughout Judea.* Peter is using the term in its widest sense to include all of historic IsraelÑan area that included the Roman provinces of Judea, Samaria and Galilee.

10:38 *under the power of the devil.* The Gospel is the news of how in Jesus God has routed the forces of Satan which oppress people spiritually, physically, emotionally, socially, etc. (Luke 11:14-20).

10:39 *They killed him.* While it was the Jewish leaders who arranged for Jesus' death, the fact that he was crucified implied Roman involvement, a fact not to be lost on Cornelius. ***hanging him on a tree.*** See Deuteronomy 21:22-23 and Acts 5:30. This became a standard way for the apostles to speak of Jesus' death, as it implied that in his death Jesus bore God's curse against sin in our place as he took our sins upon himself (Galatians 3:13-14; 1 Peter 2:24).

10:41 These appearances of Jesus after his resurrection were in effect a commissioning of those who saw him to go and tell the news to others (Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:46-49).

10:42 *judge of the living and the dead.* While none of the commissioning passages in the Gospels specifically mention this, it is certainly implied in Jesus' teaching of himself as Lord (v. 36) and as the Son of Man (Daniel 7:13-14), and is clearly stated in John 5:22,27.

10:43 *All the prophets.* See Luke 24: 44-47. Marshall notes that Peter may be thinking of such passages as Isaiah 33:24; 54:4-6; Jeremiah 31:34 and Daniel 9:24.

10:45 This phenomenon shocked Peter's companions as it violated all they had known about traditional divisions between Jews and Gentiles. It meant that the Gentiles were on equal terms before God.

10:46 Luke's mention of the fact that these Gentiles spoke in tongues was not meant to teach that this sign must always accompany the outpouring of the Spirit, but was noted to convince the Jewish believers that the Gentiles' experience of the Spirit was no less than that of the apostles.

10:47 Baptism with the Spirit usually accompanied (Acts 2:38,41) or followed (Acts 8:15-17) baptism with water, but in this ground-breaking situation the fact of the Spirit's baptism became the grounds upon which water baptism could not be denied. Had the Spirit not come at this point, the Jewish believers may have insisted that before Cornelius and his family and friends could be baptized as true followers of the Messiah they must be circumcised and agree to observe Jewish traditions about food, the Sabbath, etc.

10:48 *they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.* Violating custom once again, Peter, a Jew, accepted Gentile hospitality. This was another clear indication of his acceptance of them as full members of God's family.

Caring Time

1. Using this story, how would you respond to the question: "Can people who have never heard the Gospel be saved"? If your answer is "yes," why then did God send Peter to preach (see also 11:14)? If it is "no," how do you explain verses 34-35?

2. Consider the make-up of your church (ethnically, socially, politically, age-wise, etc.). Are there some people who would just assume that your church is not for them? Are there some forms or practices you could change to remove those barriers? How would you feel about making those changes?