

CONVICTED BY THE GOSPEL



+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Through Peter's vision and the Lord's calling to meet with Cornelius, God revealed that the gospel is for all people.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Acts 10

+ **SETTING:**

Acts 10 begins the longest episode provided by Luke. It still took place in Judea, but the gospel message was about to bust through barriers in a big way. The prominence and importance of this narrative is such that we cannot overstate. If Peter did not have the teachability and obedience to follow God's lead, Christ's church may be in quite a different place today.

DAY 1

READ:

Acts 10:1-6

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 10:1-2

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"People believe in God not merely because they feel some emotional need, but because it makes sense of what they see and experience. Indeed, we have seen that many thoughtful people are drawn toward belief somewhat unwillingly. They embrace religion because they think it is more fully true to the facts of human existence than secularism is."²

—Timothy Keller (1950–2023)

Cornelius feared God.

When we think of fearing someone, it is easy to imagine cowering in a corner, attempting to escape notice from the one we fear. But the biblical idea of fearing the Lord is not so. Yes, it can include dread of punishment, but it is much more than that primal run-and-hide reaction we experience when we've done wrong and are afraid of getting caught.

Scholars provide three senses of the phrase found throughout the Bible: (1) an essential part of the theology of Israel, or another way to communicate that one has faith in God, (2) reverent expression and practice that is in response to who God is, and (3) an identifying characteristic of God's people.¹

The fear of God is something we possess.

The fear of God is something we practice.

The fear of God is a characteristic of God's people.

As we can see in the life of Cornelius, possessing the fear of God does not save us. Rather, it is the starting point to a relationship with God. Without an awe of the splendor and sovereignty of God and the salvation He has provided, faith is impossible.

How can I demonstrate a healthy fear of God in my attitudes and actions today?

DAY 2

READ:

Acts 10:1-6

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 10:1-3

NOTES

It can be difficult to depict God. He is outside our human comprehension, and there is nothing we can compare Him to that will provide an appropriate and complete portrait of who He is. Though we cannot exactly conceptualize every detail of God, we can know Him. He does not hide from us.

Though He is incomprehensible, God comprehends us completely. God is a personal God. He created us. He knows our hearts. He hears our prayers. He calls us by name. There are so many ways God could work, but He chooses to initiate with mankind through specific and personal ways. Not only that, but He allows us to be a part of the unfolding of His plan!

Through Cornelius's story, we can observe many personal touches. God sent an angel to bring His message. The angel met Cornelius where he was and affirmed things Cornelius must have wondered: Does God hear my prayers? Does God see my desire to know Him and my attempts to worship Him? Not to mention that the angel started out by addressing Cornelius by name. Though God is altogether more than our finite minds can handle, He provides what we need—when and where we need it—so that we can be in a relationship with Him.

How have I seen God pursue and provide for me?

DAY 3

READ:

James 2:14-26

FOCAL PASSAGE:

James 2:18-19

NOTES

Acts 10:1-2 gives us an introduction to Cornelius, through which we learn some basic information. We also learn about his religious practices of good deeds and prayer practices. He was a faithful man who feared God. It seems as if he was influential as well, as his whole household followed in his footsteps. Yet, this religious, charitable, God-fearing man was still in need of salvation. The religion he possessed was not enough.

In the book of James, the half-brother of Jesus rebukes those who say they have faith but have nothing to show for it. Cornelius had works without saving faith. James spoke of the danger for those who had belief in God without any change in lifestyle or external proof of saving faith. The belief they possessed was not enough.

Perhaps the scariest reality of all is the detail James provides, that the demons—the minions of the evil one—believe in God. They know for a fact that He exists. They could ace the “All About God” quiz. But their belief is not the same as faith in and allegiance to God. James also states that the demons shudder at what they know. There is an element in which they have a fear of God. But the belief and fear they possess is not enough.

When it comes to obtaining salvation, knowing about God is insufficient. Attending religious activities is inadequate. Holding a fear of God is not satisfactory. Believing that God is real and powerful is not enough. Only faith in Christ as Messiah and Lord is sufficient to save. Grace alone carries the gift of salvation and the guarantee of an eternal future.

How do I view the results of my works for God and does it align with the truth of the gospel?

DAY 4

READ:

Acts 10:9-23

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 10:19-21

NOTES

Peter was perplexed. God gave him a very vivid vision, but Peter didn't understand what it meant right away. He had to wrestle with it, seek God for answers, and trust that the God who sent the vision would make clear what was muddy in Peter's mind. This clarity came one baby step at a time.

It is natural to want all the answers and a clear and obvious path to God's perfect will for some of our particular situations. But often, this is not how God works. He usually reveals His plan for our lives one step at a time. Typically, there are long periods of waiting between landing one step and knowing where to take the next.

Psalm 119:105 describes God's Word as a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. The lamps the psalmist would have had in mind were small, portable ones that lit a small circumference of light around the holder. We don't need every step of the way mapped out to get started. God typically just shows us the next right step to take. As we do, He will be faithful to show us what is next.

How can I move forward in obedience, taking the next step in response to His Word in my life?

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 10:25-28

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 10:28

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #74:

ADOPTION

Adoption into God's family is one of the positive benefits of justification. Not only are we pardoned from the judgment against us through justification, but we also experience a change of identity—we become children of God (John 1:12; Galatians 4:5). Through adoption our relationship with God, which was once lost through the fall, is now restored, resulting in the benefits of being an heir of God and a coheir with Christ (Romans 8:16-17).

During an exciting yet transitional time, as God's people learned how to become people of the new covenant, Peter tried to keep his promise to Jesus to feed His sheep. In a few short years, so much has occurred. Jesus turned everything upside down in the best way possible, but it took a while for God's people to figure out exactly how to live out the implication of what Christ accomplished on the cross and proved through His resurrection.

The law was an integral part of the Jewish way of life. As Jews embraced Christ, they also held fast to the law. But as Gentiles embraced Christ, how ought these very different groups worship and live life alongside one another? So much of the Jewish law proclaimed non-Jews (and much of what they do, say, and eat) as unclean. It seemed as if the very presence of a Gentile in the early church hampered a Jew's ability to worship.

Yet Peter received a divine message. There are no more "clean" and "unclean" distinctions in Christ. Adoption into the family of God is for all. This is the revelation that Peter realized (Galatians 3:28). Our faith in Christ unites all Christians, regardless of individual demographics.

Understanding adoption, how can I extend the grace of God today to someone whom I consider different?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“The seeking Saviour will find the seeking sinner. Wherever there is a searching heart, God responds. This is why it is essential that we as God’s children obey His will and share His Word. You never know when your witness for Christ is exactly what somebody has been waiting and praying for.”³

–Warren Wiersbe (1929–2019)

POINT 1: The Lord prepares people for the gospel (Acts 10:1-6).

In His desire to save all, God calls His people by name for He sees us as unique individuals with our own journeys.

? How can someone be a devout religious person who fears God, but not actually have salvation?

Those who obey and submit to God’s instructions will be prepared to receive a word from the Lord.

? How do we know when God is giving us instructions?

POINT 2: The Lord calls people to act in faith and share the gospel (Acts 10:9-16,19-23).

God prepared Peter to accept Cornelius, and other Gentiles, into the family of God, despite their differences.

? What actions do some Christians and churches today think fall outside the accepted Christian culture?

When God calls us to bring a message of hope to others, we must act in faith.

? What are other ways Peter could have responded to God’s message and call?

POINT 3: The Lord transforms people by the power of the gospel (Acts 10:25-28).

When doing the Lord’s work, we must remember to stay humble.



How do we safeguard ourselves from putting the focus on ourselves instead of Christ in ministry?

Because of the gospel, God transformed an exclusive religion into one that embraces all nations who trust in the name of Jesus.

KEY DOCTRINE #74: ADOPTION

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From Day 5: Understanding adoption, how can I extend the grace of God today to someone whom I consider different?

MY RESPONSE

Because Christ’s work has cleansed the sin of all who believe, we forgive one another of any wrongdoing and stand together in unity to show the world God’s power to change people.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways to keep the urgency of the mission at the forefront of my mind, so that I can better pray, give, and go as God leads?
- **HEART:** How can I express my gratitude to God for all He has done to include me in His family?
- **HANDS:** With whom can I share the forgiveness and grace of Christ today?



Scan this QR code to access this session’s Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“I will charge my soul to believe and to wait for Him, and will follow His providence, and not go before it, nor stay behind it.”⁴

—Samuel Rutherford
(1600–1661)