

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Shedding Partiality

Acts 10:17–48

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to Acts 10:17–48. Today we come to the dramatic conclusion of this great story we began last time. God brings together Cornelius and Peter for this pivotal moment in human history—the gospel gets advanced to the Gentiles.

But before we unpack this text, let me give you a word picture to help frame what's happening here. Visualize in your minds, if you will, a reptile. Maybe one of those reptiles in the sheet dropped down from heaven in Acts 10—a gecko, a rattlesnake, or a lizard. When a lizard sheds its skin, it's not a quick or effortless process. It rubs its body against rough surfaces. It wrestles it off. New skin pushes out the old for days until finally—out with the old and in with the new.

And why does a lizard shed its skin? Was the old skin evil? No. It was good. Was it wrong to ever have that skin? No. It was purposeful in its time. But now, the old gives way to new. It's the difference between old wineskins and new wineskins in Jesus's memorable analogy.¹

When you imagine in your minds a reptile, with difficulty, shedding its old skin, that's the word picture of what we see in Acts 10 with the Apostle Peter. He is, with difficulty, shedding the old ways of the Mosaic covenant, so that the new covenant can emerge and have its full force. He is putting to pasture the old stallion of dietary restrictions and law observance, so that he can ride freely toward the Gentiles.

And God, knowing Peter, did more than just spell it out for him: "Hey Peter, stop eating kosher and go minister to the Gentiles." God gave him this elaborate vision involving a sheet full of clean and unclean animals. And then he took that sheet up to heaven and left Peter to ponder.

And that's where we find Peter in our passage today. In verse 19, he's pondering. In verse 17, he's inwardly perplexed. "What was all that about? That sheet full of clean and unclean animals? What was that?"

Last week, I left you in suspense in Acts 10. Let me get you up to speed with what's happened so far before we dive into today's passage.

In Acts 10:1, we were introduced to a man named Cornelius. Cornelius is a centurion. He's a soldier. He's a leader of men. And he's a man of wealth and influence. He's a full-blooded Gentile, but he is also a God-fearer. He gives alms to the poor. He is a Jewish sympathizer. He prays prayers to the God of the Israelites.

And God shows up in Cornelius's life and says, "I've noticed your good works and your benevolence. And I want you to know that there's a way for you to be saved." That's wonderful news for Cornelius. Now he knows you don't have to be a Jew to be saved. You don't have to follow the law perfectly. A Gentile soldier, can have his sins forgiven. All he has to do is send for this guy Peter, and Peter will relay to him this vital piece of information.

So Cornelius sends three men to fetch Peter in Joppa and bring him to Caesarea. And while these men are feverishly traveling thirty miles in one day to find Peter in Joppa, God reveals something to Peter as well. While Peter was praying, he fell into a divinely-induced trance. And Peter has this incredible vision from heaven as a sheet of clean and unclean animals is lowered before him and God says, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." Peter says in response, "No way, Lord. My lips have never been defiled by that which is common or

¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 235–6: "The clear-cut teaching of the New Testament is that the Law of Moses has been rendered inoperative with the death of the Messiah."

unclean.” And God responds to Peter with this command, **“Don’t you call ‘common,’ what I have made clean, Peter. Don’t you do that!”** And **verse 16** tells us that this happens three times.

Now look at **verse 17**. Luke tells us that Peter is still mulling over this vision even after God revealed the message to him three times.

¹⁷ Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed² [Do you see that? He was still wrestling with this vision, trying to figure out what God was showing him] as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon’s house, stood at the gate³ ¹⁸ and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. ¹⁹ And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit⁴ said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation,⁵ for I have sent them.”

Now let me make two observations from the passage so far. First, the Spirit doesn’t explain the vision to Peter. Did you notice that? The Spirit doesn’t say, **“You see, Peter, the unclean animals represent the Gentiles which the blood of Jesus cleanses. And Christ has come to fulfill the law, so dietary laws are no longer in effect.”** The Holy Spirit doesn’t do that. He doesn’t spell it out for Peter. It’d be nice if he had done that. I’m sure Peter would have appreciated that.

But here’s something that I’ve found even in my own life. God sometimes wants us to wrestle with his purposes. God values the inward perplexity that Peter has to struggle with. God values the pondering that Peter is engaged in.

Because here’s the thing—the journey is sometimes just as important as the destination. Do you hear me on that? Sometimes the journey, the pondering, the wrestling, leads us to deeper relationship with God and makes the destination that much sweeter.

“Why am I going through this crisis, Pastor Tony? Why is God putting me through the wringer? Why this difficulty right now?” I don’t know. But I know two things. 1) Whatever you’re going through isn’t evidence that God doesn’t love you. That can’t be the case, because God sent his Son to die for your sins. And 2) All things work for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

Some of you might be going through an extended season of perplexity right now. Some of you may be pondering the deep things of God and falling short of clarity on a certain matter. Don’t begrudge the journey that God is taking you on. Have faith. Trust God in the perplexity. Cling to him. And when clarity comes (if it ever comes on this side of eternity), rejoice. And when you finally reach the destination, the journey, the struggle, will be that much sweeter for you.

In Peter’s case, when he finally gets it... when it finally sinks in what God is trying to show him, it sinks in deep into Peter’s soul. It’ll be a lesson that Peter never forgets.⁶

Now one thing that God values in his children in the midst of perplexity is obedience. Peter is wrestling, wrestling, wrestling... he’s trying to figure this vision out. And in the middle of that, God the Spirit says, **“Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.”** And as we’ll see in a second, Peter obeys. He doesn’t understand what’s going on... not yet. But he obeys. And that pleases God. **Obedience in the midst of perplexity pleases God. Just keep doing the next right thing.**

² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 391: “The term for ‘perplexed’ or ‘puzzled over’ (διηπόρει, *diēporei*) is present only in Luke-Acts (Luke 9:7 [of Herod’s view of Jesus]; Acts 2:12 [at Pentecost]; 5:24 [the prison guards about how Peter was able to get out of prison]). It is in the imperfect tense, so Peter is seen lingering over what might be going on.”

³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 492n2322: “The fact that Simon’s house had a gate (πυλῶν), which needs to be distinguished from the door (θύρα), suggests that this was a more elegant residence rather than a simple house.”

⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 391: “The reader has been presented with an angel (v. 3), a heavenly voice (vv. 13–15), and now the Spirit. For Luke, they all speak for God (and thus for the Spirit).”

⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 391–2: “The most important point the Spirit tells him is to go without trying to discern or discriminate (μηδὲν διακρινόμενος, *mēden diakrinomenos*) about what is going on... A similar phrase using ἀνακρινόμενος (*anakrinomenos*) appears in 1 Cor. 10:25, 27 to discuss buying meat in the marketplace that may have been offered to idols. This is technical language about not raising questions of conscience (v. 29 says, ‘without objection’).”

⁶ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 17: “Peter’s attitude changed that day. To be sure, there were still a lot of rough edges. Sometimes — for example, later in Antioch — he regressed. But it is also true that Peter died in Rome — the center of Gentile power. He never sheltered himself among his own people or homeland again. God changed him, and he can change us!”

Let me make an additional observation from **verse 20**. The Spirit says, **“Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation.”**⁷ Now that word “hesitation” could be translated “judging” or even “doubting.” The NASB translates it “misgivings.” I think that’s closer to the mark. **So the Spirit says essentially, “Turn off your guilty conscience, Peter. Go down there and accompany them without judging them in any way or having misgivings about them.”**

Why would Peter have misgivings about them? Well, because they are Gentiles. And he is going to be asked to go with them and enter into the unclean house of an unclean Gentile. And they might even serve unclean food while he’s there. And Peter’s OT alarm is going to go off. So the Spirit’s saying here, **“Just be cool, Peter. Turn your conscience off. Go with them. It’ll all make sense to you when you get there.”**

So, look at **verse 21**.

²¹ And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?” ²² And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation

Here they are just laying out Cornelius’s credentials, right? They’re telling Peter, **“He’s not your run-of-the-mill, pagan, Gentile soldier. He’s a good man. He’s a God-fearing man.”**

“And he...

was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house⁸ and to hear what you have to say.”

Look at **verse 23**.

²³ So [Peter] invited them in to be his guests.

That was a big deal in itself, by the way. Inviting Gentiles into a Jewish home was a big deal.⁹ It’s not as big as Jews entering a Gentile home, but it’s a step in that direction.¹⁰ It’s one of the many social and ethnic barriers that are torn down in this passage.¹¹ **Peter is shedding his skin!**

The next day [Peter] rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.

Go ahead and write this down in your notes. Peter’s shedding partiality here. And God is uniting people in Christ by the gospel. And here’s the first thing that God uses to unite people in Christ.

God Unites People in Christ through:

1) Obedient **messengers** (10:17–23)

God the Spirit told Peter to go. Peter goes! God the Son told Peter, **“Go, make disciples of all nations.”** God the Son told Peter, **“Be my witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.”** And Peter’s almost there. **The dam is about to break.**

Last week, we saw Peter make a ridiculous statement. The Lord told him to kill and eat an unclean And he said in response, **“Absolutely not... Lord.” “I can’t do what you tell me to do... Lord.”** But now, to Peter’s credit, he travels thirty miles north of Joppa to pagan Gentile territory, to enter an unclean Gentile house. Why? Because God told him to. **And God loves obedient messengers. God uses that to unite us in him.**

So Peter and these three men hit the road for Caesarea. **Verse 23** says,

⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 493: “The expression is usually translated as ‘without hesitation’ in the sense of ‘without entertaining doubts.’ While this somewhat trivial meaning is not impossible, it is not likely in the context of the vision. As Peter has just been directed by the heavenly voice three times not to treat pure animals differently from impure animals but slaughter and eat animals that only profane Gentiles eat (vv. 12–15), he is now directed by the Spirit not to make a distinction that he would normally make between pure Jews and morally impure and profane Gentiles.”

⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 392: “For Peter to enter a Gentile home would be defiling according to strict Judaism; as m. *’Ohol.* 18.7 reads, ‘The dwelling places of Gentiles are unclean.’”

⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 257: “That Peter was beginning to understand is exemplified by his inviting them to spend the evening as guests. Already he was beginning to have fellowship with Gentiles he formerly considered unclean.”

¹⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 392: “This would not be viewed as containing as much risk of uncleanness as a Jew going to a Gentile home, but it is still a significant step. It probably would be regarded as risking potential exposure to uncleanness by the more scrupulous observers of law. Jubilees 22.16 reads, ‘Separate yourself from the nations, And eat not with them: And do not according to their works, And become not their associate; For their works are unclean, And all their ways are a pollution and an abomination and uncleanness.’”

¹¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 236: “The believer in the Messiah is free from the Law of Moses. This means that he is free from the necessity of keeping any commandment of that system. But on the other hand, he is also free to keep parts of the Law of Moses if he so desires, as long as it does not contradict the law of the Messiah.”

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.

Acts 11:12 tells us that there were six men, almost certainly Jews, who accompanied Peter from Joppa. So we have seven Jews—Peter and his posse. And we have three Gentiles traveling with them. A party of ten witnesses.

And **verse 24** says,

²⁴ *And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.*

So while his servants were away fetching Peter, Cornelius gathered all of his friends and relatives at his house. **“You guys have got to come to my house for this. This guy is going to tell us how we can be saved. This is the most important day of our lives!”** And there’s anticipation in Cornelius’s house. There’s urgency. This guy had been searching and praying and hoping for clarity regarding his relationship with God, and now it’s about to happen.

And **verse 25** says,

²⁵ *When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.*

“Whoa! Relax Cornelius! What are you doing?” I think Cornelius got a little carried away here.¹² Perhaps, he was just showing respect to Peter. Perhaps he was just paying homage to Peter. But whatever the case, Peter’s having none of this.

²⁶ *But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up;¹³ I too am a man.”*

I find it interesting that some people who believe that Peter was the first pope, fail to recognize that their “first pope” told people, “Don’t bow down to me, I’m just a man!” For the record, I don’t believe in apostolic succession. And I don’t believe that Peter was the first pope. But for those who do believe that, I wish that they would expect their spiritual leader who follows in the footsteps of Peter to do what Peter does here and say, “Don’t bow to me... I too am just a man.” I would like to hear that more from our Catholic friends.¹⁴

For Cornelius’s part, he doesn’t know any better. And Peter has to correct him. That’s what spiritual leaders do. And look at **verse 27**.

²⁷ *And as [Peter] talked with [Cornelius], [Peter] went in and found many persons gathered.*

I’m sure Cornelius was like, **“This is my great aunt Helen from Ephesus. She made this casserole. She came all the way down here to hear your message. And this is my uncle Titus from Tarsus. He fears God like I do. And he wants to have peace with the Hebrew God just like me. And here are some of my soldiers who are in my battalion. They fear God too.”**

I don’t know how many people were there to listen to Peter’s message. But I would guess something like fifty people came. Remember, Cornelius was a man of influence. He had a hundred soldiers under his charge. And since centurions were well-paid, he probably had a large, palatial dwelling that could accommodate a lot of people. Whatever the case, Peter has a meaningful number of very captive listeners in this house to hear his message. This is a dream-come-true for any evangelist! **I’d love to go into a house full of people anxious to hear the gospel.**

But Peter’s gospel-presentation gets off to an awkward start. Look at **verse 28**.

¹² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 258n92: “Such behavior would not have been unusual for a Gentile like Cornelius. Prostrating oneself at the feet of another was a common Near Eastern gesture of respect, and Cornelius surely identified Peter with his angelic vision and may well have seen him as more than an ordinary man. Bowing as an act of reverence is particularly frequent in Matthew: cf. 8:2; 9:18; 15:25; 18:26; 20:20; cf. Luke 8:41; Acts 9:4; 22:7.”

¹³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 496: “The fact that the very first word that Peter says in the presence of Cornelius, who is a commanding officer in the Roman army, is a command formulated as an imperative, ‘stand up’ (ἀνάστηθι), is not so much irony but an expression of Peter’s abhorrence of being mistaken for a divine being, robbing the one true God of his glory.”

¹⁴ AMMONIUS: “If such a man as Peter did not allow him to kneel down before him but rather made himself an equal of Cornelius, and he said these things to one who was still a Gentile, what must we say about all other people?” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 131.

²⁸ And [Peter] said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful¹⁵ it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit¹⁶ anyone of another nation,¹⁷

That’s not your typical ice-breaker for an audience! **“Let me start by saying how wrong it is for me to be here. Jews shouldn’t socialize with Gentiles.” “Thank you, Peter, we like spending time with you too.”**

What’s going on here? Peter’s shedding partiality. **He’s a reptile shedding its skin.**

but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

Aha! Now it all comes together! This is Peter’s “eureka moment.” Because when did God show Peter that he should not call any person common or unclean? God showed him animals on that sheet, not people! When did he make the connection between those animals and the Gentiles? I don’t know. Luke never specifies.

But right here, he gets it. Maybe walking into Cornelius’s house and seeing all these people helped him to put it together...

... God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

Bravo, Peter! He’s got it! That bizarre, object lesson prophecy with the sheet full of animals is finally starting to make sense to him. Peter may be flawed, as we all are, but he’s teachable. Peter may be a little dense, like we all are, but when he grasps a truth that God has shown him, he gets it. He’s teachable.

And look at **verse 29**.

²⁹ *So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”*

Now I don’t think that Peter understands everything just yet. If he did, he wouldn’t have asked **“Why’d you send for me?”** in **verse 29**. **“Don’t you know Peter? Isn’t it obvious? They need to get saved!”** Maybe he has an inkling of that, but he waits for them to state the matter clearly.

So look what Cornelius says here in **verse 30**. We know this part already, because Luke told us this at the beginning of **Acts 10**. But Peter’s hearing this for the first time from the man himself.

³⁰ *And Cornelius said, “Four days ago,¹⁸ about this hour, I was praying¹⁹ in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man²⁰ stood before me in bright clothing³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.’³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’³³ So I sent for you at once, and you have been **kind** enough to come.”²¹*

Kind? Peter just rudely said that it was unlawful for him to be there. But Cornelius doesn’t care about that. He knows how difficult it would be for a Jew to enter his house. And besides, all he cares about ultimately is the message the Peter has.

¹⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 496: “The term translated as ‘not allowed’ (ἀθέμιτος) refers to behavior which is forbidden. Most English versions translate with ‘unlawful;’ a better rendering is ‘against our laws’ (NLT) because it leaves the question open which specific laws Peter was afraid to violate; helpful is GNB, ‘a Jew is not allowed by his religion.’ The Mosaic law does not forbid Israelites to eat with Gentiles. Jews are only forbidden to eat impure food, which they can do by eating only the vegetables that are part of the Gentiles’ diet. Nor does later Jewish tradition uniformly and unanimously stipulate a prohibition concerning Jews visiting Gentiles.”

¹⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 496: “Luke characterizes the problem that Peter says his visit poses for him with two verbs—a Jew²³⁵¹ should not ‘associate with’ (κολλᾶσθαι) nor ‘visit’ (προσέρχεσθαι) a pagan. Both verbal forms are present infinitives and thus indicate a continuous, extensive association.”

¹⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 394: “The concern was that a Jewish person would become unclean during the visit with a Gentile who had contact with unclean food and other types of uncleanness from the viewpoint of the Torah. Some contact was allowed, but to eat and visit, as Peter does here, was prohibited... John 18:28 shows that visiting a Gentile house renders one unclean. Josephus (*Life* 3 §14) has the example of imprisoned Jews in Rome eating only figs and nuts to protect themselves from being unclean (Leviticus Rabbah on Lev. 20).”

¹⁸ That’s “four days” by ancient reckoning. The first day the servants went to Joppa. The second day they arrived. The third day they left from Joppa. The fourth day they arrived in Caesarea. By our reckoning, we would say three days ago or 72 hours ago. The same matter is in play with Jesus’s death and resurrection. If Jesus died on a Friday and was raised on a Sunday, by modern reckoning, we would say he was raised after two days. But the ancients would include Friday, Saturday, and Sunday as days, and so they say he was raised on the third day. See Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 394.

¹⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 258n95: “The Greek could be construed in v. 30 as ‘four days ago until this hour, I was praying,’ thus indicating Cornelius’s continual prayer for four days.”

²⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 498: “Cornelius does not presume, as a Gentile, to be able to identify an angel of Israel’s God and thus describes him as ‘a man in a brightly shining garment’ (ἀνὴρ ... ἐν ἐσθῇτι λαμπρᾷ; v. 30f).”

²¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 239: “Cornelius commended Peter for his courage in breaking with Jewish custom.”

So look how he ends his speech in **verse 33**.²²

*Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.*²³

Talk about a captive audience. I envision this room full of Gentiles gazing longingly at Peter. They are hanging on his every word. **“What’s the message, Peter?” “What is it? Tell us!”**

Write this down as a second point in your message today. Here’s another thing that God uses to unite people in Christ. Not just obedient messengers, but also...

2) Receptive **listeners** (10:24–33)

And let me clarify something here. This is not just some token gesture of goodwill between Jews and Gentiles. **“I came into your house. You came into my house. Let’s pretend like we like each other.”** This wasn’t a publicity stunt. These Gentiles don’t want to just be honored by having a Jewish guest in their home. They want the *message*. They want to hear from God. And Peter is the *messenger*. **“What does God have to say? Tell us! We’ve got to know.”**

Do you remember that turmoil you felt before you gave your life to Christ? Do you remember that, church? Do you remember the burden of sin that was just crushing you? And that desire that you had to know God and be at peace with God? Do you remember that? That’s what these guys are feeling.

Sanja has talked with me before about the burden she had before she came to Christ. It was such a crushing burden that she despaired of life itself. She desperately wanted to know how to have peace with God.

And that’s what these people are feeling right now. That’s why they are hanging on Peter’s every word. They’ve got to know, **“How can I have peace with a holy God? How can I have my sins forgiven? How, Peter? Tell us!”**

And there might be someone in this room listening to this message right now, and you feel similarly. “How might I have peace with God? How can I be saved? How can I have my sins forgiven? These sins are weighing me down, and I have no hope! What has God done to give me hope?”

If that’s you right now, listen up. These may be the most important words that you’ve ever heard in your life. Look what Peter says in verse 34.

²² Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 238: “The sentence implies a sense of eager expectation and hope. Cornelius had directed his mind toward the meeting with Peter by calling together his kinsmen, meaning his family and relatives, as well as his close friends. He knew that he would hear a message of salvation, and he was not going to keep it all to himself or limit it to his family.”

²³ THE ENGLISH ANNOTATIONS: “Cornelius probably said this to assure Peter that he would be a careful and attentive listener of the mysteries of faith, which is a great encouragement to ministers to execute their ministry cheerfully. By contrast, a drowsy or inattentive audience not only disheartens the minister but also intercepts the blessing of God which comes on them through the minister. Thus, the power of the word preached is hindered.” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 139.

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no²⁴ partiality,^{25 35} but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right²⁶ is acceptable²⁷ to him.”²⁸

There it is. That’s what that sheet with all those animals was about. Peter gets it. Gentiles can get saved. **“What God has cleansed by the blood of Jesus, Peter, don’t you call that unclean! Don’t do that, Peter.”**

Really Peter should have known that this was Jesus’s intent all along. Jesus told them, **“Go be my witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.”** Maybe Peter thought that Jesus just meant to the Jews who are around the world and immigrated to the ends of the earth. No, Peter. Jesus came for Gentiles too. And God shows no partiality.

And so, Peter preaches the gospel to a room full of Gentiles. And here’s the gospel. Are you ready to hear the gospel, church? Do you love it? Do you love the gospel? Do you believe it? Here it is.²⁹

Peter’s preached it before. But this time, for the first time, he’s preaching to Gentiles.³⁰

²⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 395: “Peter begins with his new theological insight—God shows no partiality (προσωπολήμπτως, *prosōpolēmpēs*)... The word conveys the idea that God ‘receives faces’ or ‘lifts up the face’ that bows to him in acceptance. The point is that he makes no distinction in how he reacts to people. All have the same potential access to God. In every nation, those who fear him and perform righteousness are acceptable to him.”

²⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 499n2371: “Paul’s argument with the truth of God’s nonpartiality (προσωπολημψία) focuses on the point that God will judge Jews who sin just as he judges Gentile sinners, Rom 2:11; cf. Col 3:25; Eph 6:9; see also Jas 2:1. The Greek term, used only in Christian texts, derives from the LXX expression πρόσωπον λαμβάνω which translates the Hebrew expression פָּנַי אֶשָּׂא lit., ‘lift up the face (of someone)’ which means positively ‘to show consideration for’ (e.g., Gen 19:21; Num 6:26), negatively “to show partiality” (e.g., Lev 19:15; Ps 82:2; Prov 18:5), with Yahweh being ‘the model of impartial justice, showing favor to none and refusing to be bribed’ (H. Simian-Yofre, ‘פָּנַי,’ TDOT 11:601, referring to Deut 10:17; Job 34:19).”

²⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 260–1: “This raises the problem of faith and works. Was God responding to Cornelius’s works, ‘rewarding’ him, so to speak, by bringing Peter with the saving gospel and granting him his gift of the Spirit? One must be careful not to introduce Paul’s theology into a context that is not dealing with the same issues, but one should also note that even Paul was capable of describing the impartial justice of God as being based on one’s good or evil works (Rom 2:9–11). The early church fathers struggled with the question of faith and works in Cornelius, and perhaps Augustine’s view offers as good an answer as any. Cornelius, like Abraham, had shown himself to be a man of faith and trust in God. God was already working his grace in him, and it manifested itself in his good deeds. Now God would show him his greatest grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit. The stress on both Cornelius’s devoutness and his works is perhaps, then, a good corrective to an abused doctrine of grace with no implications for behavior and a reminder of James’s dictum that at base, faith and works are inseparable.”

²⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 499n2372: “The term translated as ‘(God) accepts’ (δεκτός) means being met with approval in someone’s company, acceptable, welcome (BDAG s.v. δεκτός 1). The term is used in the LXX for the acceptance of sacrifices by God, cf. Exod 28:34; Lev 1:3–4; 17:4; 19:5; Isa 56:7; 60:7; Jer 6:20; Mal 2:13. In Prov 12:22 and 15:8 faithful behavior and the prayers of the righteous, respectively, are said to be acceptable to God.”

²⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 396: “The point is not that Cornelius earned righteousness as his due (Rom. 4:5) but that his responsiveness leads God to send Peter to reveal more of God’s way to him, as the rest of the speech points the way to what Cornelius now must do.” Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 500: “When Peter asserts that Cornelius is ‘accept[ed]’ by God he does not describe him as having earned salvation on account of his fear of God and his righteous behavior. Peter’s retelling of the message which Cornelius had received from the angel clarifies that Peter did not regard the Roman centurion and his family to be saved, as salvation comes (now) only through hearing and accepting Peter’s message about Jesus, Israel’s Messiah and Savior (11:14), a fact that Peter emphasizes at the end of his sermon (10:43). Note also that the Jerusalem church eventually acknowledges that the Gentiles in Caesarea have repented and received from God ‘life’ (11:18).”

²⁹ MARTIN LUTHER: “This is a beautiful sermon and testimony of Christ’s resurrection. As the preaching of the apostles and the gospel should be, he does not merely narrate the history but also the power and use of this history.” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 140.

³⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 260: “Peter’s sermon at Cornelius’s basically followed the pattern of his prior sermons to the Jews but with several significant differences. One is found at the very outset, where he stressed that God shows no favoritism, accepts people from every nation, and that Jesus is ‘Lord of all.’”

³⁶ As for the word³¹ that [God] sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),³² ³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea,³³ beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸ how God anointed³⁴ Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day³⁵ and made him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him³⁶ after he rose from the dead. ³⁷ ⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone [not just Jews... everyone] who believes³⁸ in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”³⁹

That’s the gospel! That’s how a person gets saved. That’s how a person receives forgiveness of their sins. **Do you believe that? Have you been saved?**

“So Peter, let me get this straight. You mean to tell me that even pagan, godless, Gentiles can be saved?” Absolutely. “Even Gentiles in the United States of America?” Yes. Every day that happens around the world. And this is where it all started in **Acts 10**.

Write this down as a third point from the message. God Unites People in Christ through obedient messengers, receptive listeners, and thirdly,

3) Gospel **proclamation** (10:34–43)

Look, my name’s not Peter. And I’m not an apostle. But I’m here this morning to do the same thing that Peter did two-thousand years ago. And that’s to herald the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. I’m here to proclaim that Jesus is Lord. And by faith in him you can have your sins forgiven.

You don’t have to work for your salvation. You can’t work for your salvation. But praise be to God, Jesus has done the work for you. And as Peter told this room of Gentiles two-thousand years ago, “everyone who believes in Jesus (believes in his death as an atonement for sin and believes in his resurrection as the victory over death) ...

everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

And if you want to receive that forgiveness, I want to challenge you to do that right now. Don’t wait till we get to the end of this message. Don’t wait for the final song. Don’t wait to talk to someone about it. Don’t wait till tomorrow morning. You may not get a “tomorrow morning.”

Right now, bow your head and admit before the Lord, “I’m a sinner. And I believe what the Bible says about Jesus. I believe in Jesus’s death and resurrection. And from this point forward in my life, I confess Jesus as Lord. I can’t save myself. I can’t atone for my own sin. I can’t do enough works to compensate for my own sinfulness. I receive the free gift of salvation that Jesus gives. And it’s by his blood that I am forgiven.” Just communicate that to the Lord right now.

And if you are already a believer in Jesus Christ, then just say “Thank you, thank you, thank you, Jesus, for saving a sinner like me.” Because

³¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 396: “The term ‘word’ is placed forward in the Greek sentence for emphasis... The word here refers to the apostolic, preached message about Jesus and the gospel. The gospel message contains an opportunity for peace (εἰρήνην, *eirēnēn*).”

³² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 397: “Since he is Lord of all, the gospel can go to all, including people of the nations.”

³³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 501: “He presumes that Cornelius and his friends have basic information about what happened during Jesus’ public ministry. A Jewish preacher who performs miracles and draws large crowds would certainly not have escaped the notice of the Roman governor and his troops stationed in Caesarea, only about 100 kilometers (62 miles) from Capernaum.”

³⁴ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 241–2: “The Greek word for ‘anointed,’ *echrisen*, has the same root as the Greek word for ‘Christ.’ God anointed Yeshua, He ‘messiahed’ Him with the Holy Spirit.”

³⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 399: “The third day is counted inclusively (Friday = day 1; Saturday = day 2; Sunday = day 3).”

³⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 262: “Particularly striking and unique to this sermon is Peter’s stress on Jesus’ appearance to the apostles after his resurrection, even his eating and drinking with them. This emphasis would have been particularly important in preaching to Gentiles like Cornelius for whom the idea of a bodily resurrection was a new concept (cf. 17:18).”

³⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 397: “The outline of Peter’s summary very much parallels Mark’s presentation of Jesus’s ministry: John the Baptist, the Galilean ministry, and then Jesus meeting his fate in Jerusalem. Luke’s Gospel follows this outline as well.”

³⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 400: “Everyone who believes in this forgiveness receives this salvation. Christians are described as ‘those who believe,’ a key response in Acts (passages referring to those who believe: Acts 14:23; 19:4; 9:42; 11:17; 16:31; use of the verb ‘to believe,’ 5:14; 8:12; 16:34; 18:8; 24:14; 26:27; 27:25).”

³⁹ MARTIN LUTHER: “By this Preacher of Peace—as the prophets call him—it is shown not that he will be a fleshly king but rather that in his name all who believe will receive the forgiveness of sins.” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 143.

everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

One more thing. One more point. God unites people in Christ through...

4) Spirit-filled **Baptism** (10:44–48)

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.

I love this. Peter doesn't even finish his sermon before these guys get saved.⁴⁰ **"Sorry Peter, this can't wait."** And the Holy Spirit falls on them.⁴¹

And **verse 45** says,

⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.⁴²

Some have called this the "Gentile Pentecost." I think that's exactly right. This is like **Acts 2** all over again, except this time it's Gentiles not Jews. Maybe something like those visible "flaming tongues of fire" fell on them just like the disciples in the upper room. I don't know. But something observable happened.⁴³ The Jewish believers from Joppa were amazed by it. They heard these Gentiles speaking in tongues and praising God.

And by the way, I think that the tongues here are the same as **Acts 2**. They start speaking in languages unfamiliar to the speakers, but familiar to the listeners. If you remember in **Acts 2**, the disciples spoke in tongues that they didn't know.⁴⁴ But the audience that had gathered from around the world knew what they were saying. It was a supernatural event that authenticated the message and brought about mass conversion in Jerusalem.⁴⁵

So I envision something similar to that happening here at the Gentile Pentecost. The Gentiles of Cornelius's family started speaking in Aramaic or Hebrew or some other languages that they didn't know. But the Jewish listeners did know those languages. And so the spread of the gospel to these Gentiles was authenticated by their praising God in languages that these Jewish believers understood.

Notice too, they didn't use tongues to extol themselves or draw attention to themselves. They used them to extol God. For the record, I'm more inclined these days towards a cessationist position on tongues than a continuationist position. But for my continuationist friends who do see the use of tongues as operative in today's churches, I'd like to see more of this. I'd like to see more extolling God and less drawing attention to self. There's too much charismatic chaos in churches today. And there's not enough worship of God.

Several weeks ago I told you that I would share more with you on the issue of tongues in the church. Let's address that now. There are three occurrences of tongues in the book of **Acts (2:3–4; 10:46; 19:6)**. In each of those cases, those tongues are foreign languages. It's not gibberish. And God used tongues in this NT era to confirm the Holy Spirit's presence in believers. That was important in **Acts 2** at Pentecost. And that was important here.

Notice what the text says in **verse 45**.

⁴⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 263: "He was, however, cut short. The miracle of repentance and forgiveness occurred before he could even extend the invitation, and the Spirit sealed the event."

⁴¹ CHRYSOSTOM: "Observe God's providential management. He does not suffer the speech to be finished or the baptism to take place upon a command of Peter, but, when he has made it evident how admirable their state of mind is, and a beginning is made of the work of teaching and they have believed that assuredly baptism is the remission of sins, then the Spirit immediately comes upon them." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 139.

⁴² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 401: "What they hear are Gentiles speaking in tongues and 'magnifying God' (μεγαλυνόντων τὸν θεόν, *megalynontōn ton theon*). The term *μεγαλύνω* (*megalynō*) appears eight times in the NT (Matt. 23:5–7; Luke 1:46–48, 58; Acts 5:12–13; 10:45–46; 19:17; 2 Cor. 10:14–16; Phil. 1:18–20; OT: Ps. 34:3 [33:4 LXX]). The remarks are similar to Acts 2:11 as well, where the mighty works of God were declared."

⁴³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 263: "It was an audible, visible, objective demonstration of the Spirit's coming upon them."

⁴⁴ For more on this, see the article by Ryan Lytton entitled, "What Is Speaking in Tongues? Should You Do It? Bible Answers," 05-24-23: <https://www.logos.com/grow/nook-speaking-in-tongues/>

⁴⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 264: "Like the Pentecost of Acts, it was a unique, unrepeatable event. It was scarcely programmatic."

⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.

There are other ways that the gift of the Holy Spirit was manifested in a person's life, but this is the most obvious example.⁴⁶ This was evidence of a miracle. So God was showing these Jewish believers here that they share one Spirit in common with these Gentiles. To use Paul's language later in **Ephesians**: "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (**Eph 4:4–6**).

Now, can God use the gift of tongues in our own day to confirm the gift of the Spirit? I would answer, **"Yes, of course, he can."** But that's not normative in the Christian church. My official position on this matter is called "Open but Cautious."⁴⁷ Yes, God can do that. But it's not his normal means of revealing the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. I would even say that it's not the normal way in which the Holy Spirit is revealed in the NT. The Spirit is displayed through multiple means. And the gifts of the Holy Spirit are myriad and varied. Tongues is presented as just one of those gifts.

So here's our official position on this matter as a church. We've spent some time drafting this as elders. And we want to read it to you now.

Sign Gifts: Cessationism and Continuationism

"Sign gifts are the demonstration of the Spirit through the gift of healing, the gift of miracles, the gift of tongues and interpretation of tongues, and the gift of prophecy. These gifts as shown in the New Testament had specific uses, primarily for the authentication of the message and the messenger, and the furtherance of the Gospel. Additionally the gift of prophecy was primarily for the proclamation of divine revelation and/or proclamation of future events as revealed through that gift. We believe that the revelatory part of the gift of prophecy ceased with the canonization of the Bible. Additionally, we do not accept the teaching of apostolic succession nor the present-day office of apostle, believing that the office of apostle ended with the closing of the biblical canon.

There are two main viewpoints concerning the remaining sign gifts – that they have ceased or that they are continuing. At VBVF, many will hold to one or the other of these viewpoints. We welcome believers who hold to either viewpoint. With that said, the preaching and teaching of the Word of God as well as the orderly worship of our God during services, small groups and other VBVF gatherings are preeminent. The disruption of either of these main focuses of VBVF is prohibited.

We believe that the excesses of the current charismatic movement and associated teaching and practices are not biblical, and this movement puts an over emphasis on the sign gifts and related phenomena not found in Scripture. Examples would include holy laughter, being slain in the Spirit, uncontrolled use of tongues, the practice of "teaching" the gift of tongues, and other disruptive practices that detract and distract from biblical teaching and worship."

That's our official position on that matter. I know that may surface questions for some of you on how this is understood or practiced in our church or in your own personal life. We welcome you to come and talk to us if you have specific questions on this matter.

Back to the narrative. Let's not lose sight of the broader presentation of what God is doing here in **Acts 10**. What did the tongues among Cornelius's household suggest? For Peter's part, Peter recognizes it as conversion. Peter recognizes that these Gentiles have gotten saved. Because look at **verse 47**.

Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

⁴⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 264: "Only an undeniable demonstration of divine power could overrule all objections, and God provided precisely that in Cornelius's house."

⁴⁷ See the four views represented in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?: 4 Views* (Counterpoints: Bible and Theology), ed. Wayne Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

This is a rhetorical question, by the way.⁴⁸ Can anyone withhold water? **This is like a pastor saying at a wedding, “Is there any reason why these two shouldn’t be married?” Of course not. They’re up there in their wedding garments. They’ve already taken their vows. The horse is out of the barn.**

Peter says,

“Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people[?]”

No, They’re saved; they should get baptized.

⁴⁸ And [Peter] commanded them to be baptized⁴⁹ in the name⁵⁰ of Jesus Christ.⁵¹

Peter says, **“Get baptized!”** He commanded it! Not in order to be saved, but because they were saved. **If there’s someone here this morning who is a saved, but unbaptized, follower of Jesus Christ, let me tell you what the Apostle Peter told Cornelius and his household two-thousand years ago. “Get baptized!”** Then they asked [Peter] to remain for some days.

That last sentence is really significant. Peter stayed on with these “unclean” Gentiles at Cornelius’s “unclean” house for some days. This further proves that Peter now fully understands what God told him, **“Don’t you call unclean what I have cleansed.” Peter has shed his skin. He’s shed his partiality.⁵² He knows now that uncleanness isn’t a matter of Jew or Gentile.⁵³ It’s about faith in Christ.**

It doesn’t matter what the color of your skin is. It doesn’t matter what country you’re from. It doesn’t matter if you are from a big city or a small town. It doesn’t matter how old you are or what kind of family you grew up in. It doesn’t matter if you’re Scottish or English or German or Israeli. It doesn’t matter if your Chinese or Swahili or Croatian or Cameroonian. God shows no partiality!⁵⁴ God is no respecter of persons!⁵⁵ And those who are part of the family of God are one in Christ Jesus.⁵⁶ Amen?

Let’s bow together in a word of prayer, and then we can sing.

⁴⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 401: “The interrogative particle μήτι (*mēti*) tells us the expected answer: ‘No, nothing should prevent this.’”

⁴⁹ Calvin argues too much here: “For since baptism is an appendage to the spiritual grace, a person who receives the Spirit is at the same time fit to receive baptism. And this is the proper order, so that a minister admits to the external sign those whom God has testified to be his children by the pledge and proof of his Spirit. So teaching and faith play their parts first. But the inference that ignorant people draw from this, that infants must be debarred from baptism, is absolutely groundless. I admit that those who are outside the church must be instructed before the symbol of adoption is conferred on them, but I maintain that believers’ children, who are born within the church, are members of the family of the kingdom of God from the womb. Yes, and what is more, I turn back on them the argument which they absurdly use against us. For since God has adopted the children of believers before they are born, I establish from that, that they must not be cheated of the external sign.” Quoted in Esther Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts: New Testament*, vol. VI, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 148. Clearly it’s only the Spirit-filled in Cornelius’s household that are baptized, and that is a practice that should be followed in the church.

⁵⁰ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 246: “They were to baptize in the name of Yeshua the Messiah, as in Acts 2:38 and 19:5. This is what distinguishes believer’s baptism from proselyte baptism and John’s baptism.”

⁵¹ We should not make too much of the fact that the Trinitarian formula of Matthew 28:18 – 20 isn’t explicitly used here. As Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 401 comments, “The Trinity is quite active here... God takes the initiative. Jesus Christ is at the center of the plan. The Spirit confirms that all of this is God’s work.”

⁵² This issue will crop up again for Peter, though, as Paul notes in Galatians 2:11–13. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 265n112: “It would later become a problem for Peter when the same conservative elements pressured him to withdraw from table fellowship with Gentiles in Antioch (Gal 2:11–13), a reminder that enough social pressure can thwart even the strongest convictions.”

⁵³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 402: “Jews and Gentiles are equal in Christ (Eph. 2:11–22).”

⁵⁴ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 17: “Do we see those around us as potential heirs of grace? Do we view those who are different from us and who do things we do not approve of as candidates for the kingdom? Our attitude makes all the difference. If we are anti-Semitic, we will never lead a Jew to Christ. If we have written off a relative, he or she may be written off for eternity. If we are elitists, most of the rest of the world will never experience grace through us.”

⁵⁵ JOHN CALVIN: “It will seem that respect of person did influence God for a time. For when he passed over the Gentiles and chose the Jews for his own people, did he not respect persons? I reply that the reason for this discrimination must not be sought in people, but it depends altogether on the secret purpose of God.” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 141.

⁵⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 260: “Peter saw that God does not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnic background, looking up to some and down on others. But God does discriminate between those whose behavior is acceptable and those whose attitude is not acceptable.”