

Key:

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

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Breaking Down Ethnic Barriers

Acts 10:1–16

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to Acts 10, as we continue our series, "No Other Name." The title of today's message is "Breaking Down Ethnic Barriers." Let's do this.

I have a good friend who is ethnically Chinese and grew up in Vietnam. I've shared a little bit about him in the past. But what I didn't tell you is that my friend, Hang Tu, is married to someone who is Japanese. His wife's name is Kanade. And for those of you who know something about the Chinese, you know... an ethnically Chinese person married to an ethnically Japanese person... let's just say that's pretty rare. And yet they've been married for eighteen years. They have three beautiful children. They've been serving the Lord together in ministry all of that time. What could they possibly have in common that would allow them to break down those ethnic barriers? Well, they share in common *the Lord Jesus Christ*.

Similarly, Sanja and I have a nephew who we've watched grow up in Croatia. Good kid. Loves the Lord. He's not a kid anymore. He's closer to thirty than twenty. And about seven years ago he fell in love with a girl from Serbia. Croatian boy. Serbian girl. If you know anything about that situation, you know, that can be complicated. Relationships like that are often frowned upon in the former Yugoslavia. But they got married. They're about to have their first baby. They are doing great as a couple. What could they possibly have in common that would allow them to break down those ethnic barriers in their culture? Well, they share in common *the Lord Jesus Christ*.

Now let me paint you another picture. Let's compare two men from radically different backgrounds in the book of Acts. One man is a Gentile. More than that, he's a soldier. More than that, he's a leader of soldiers. He's an uncircumcised, unclean, enemy of the Jewish people. And he lives in a heavily populated Gentile community on the Mediterranean coast. His name is Cornelius.

In contrast to Cornelius, you have another man in the book of Acts. He's a scrupulous Jew. He's from a small town on the shores of Galilee. He's a fisherman. He's very fastidious about Jewish practice and Jewish customs. His name is Simon, a very Jewish name. But Jesus called him "Peter" (Πέτρος [*Petros*] in Greek), because he's a rock. And he was tasked by Jesus with advancing the mission of this Jewish Messiah throughout the world.

So let's compare and contrast these two men. Gentile and Jew. Soldier and fisherman. Uncircumcised and circumcised. They have nothing in common. The world would look at them and say, "These guys should be mortal enemies. One should arrest the other, or they should try to assassinate one another." "Surely they can't be friends. Surely they have nothing in common." And yet, there is something that, by the end of their interaction in Acts 10, they will share in common.¹ What is that, Pastor Tony? Well, I don't want to spoil it for you... let's dive in and see.

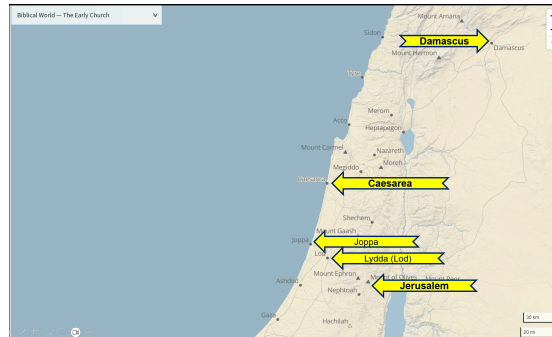
¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 383: "The significance of this scene is that what began as a Jewish movement struggling for acceptance within Judaism has now expanded to become a movement to reach all people. God directs and confirms this expansion. Theophilus may well have been a "God-fearer" who was struggling with his choice to be part of this Jesus movement. After all, many of the original Jewish recipients of the kingdom promise were hesitant to join. In addition, the God-fearers and Gentiles to whom the movement expanded later were controversial members. Did Theophilus really belong here? Was this really God's movement, given the persecution it was facing? Should he stay in or be a part of it? Luke's answer is that God designed all of this, namely, Jesus's rejection, the church's suffering, and, especially, Gentile inclusion."

By the way, there are events in human history that are what you might call “seminal moments.” This, right here, in Acts 10, is a seminal moment in human history—the gospel goes to Gentiles.²

Let’s see what happens.³ Look at **verse 1**. Luke writes,

¹At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius,⁴ a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort,⁵

Now last week in Acts 9, Peter was in Lydda and then he traveled to Joppa.



Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea⁶

He healed Aeneas in Lydda and then he raised Tabitha from the dead in Joppa. And now Luke tells us that about 30 miles north of Joppa, in this city of Caesarea there was a centurion named Cornelius.⁷

Now let me just fill in some details for you about centurions. Centurions were soldiers who were in charge of 100 men or 1/6 of a cohort. A cohort was a group of approximately 600 soldiers. A legion was 6,000 soldiers. A cohort was 600 soldiers. And a century was 100 soldiers. Cornelius, as a centurion, was in charge of 100 men. Therefore he had a significant leadership role as a military commander.⁸

Centurions were also well-paid.⁹ So this guy Cornelius epitomizes everything that Jews hated in this day. He was a wealthy, uncircumcised, gentile, Roman soldier living in a pagan city on the outskirts of Israel. That

² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 474: “The basic point of the narrative [Acts 10:1–11:18] is the acceptance of uncircumcised Gentiles, who have come to faith in Jesus, into the fellowship of the people of God... Luke does not actually claim that Cornelius was the first Gentile to be converted, although in the narrative of Acts he is the first pagan to come to faith in Jesus.” Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 382: “It is what Cornelius represents as a Gentile that makes his character so important to Acts. Soon there will be many Corneliuses.”

³ Sproul, *Acts*, 180: “Acts 10 is one of the most important chapters of the entire book of Acts, if not the most important chapter. Actually, it is one of the most important chapters in the entire New Testament because it brings to our attention an extremely important moment in redemptive history, a time of transition from the old way of doing things to a whole new epoch of God’s redemptive activity.”

⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 251: “That [Cornelius] was mentioned by name is perhaps indicative that he was well known in the early Christian communities for whom Luke wrote... Centurions generally are depicted in a favorable light throughout the Gospels and Acts, and this may well be evidence of the success of the early Christian mission among the military.”

⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 385: “Cornelius’s unit has a name, the Italian Cohort, and is probably an auxiliary force, not part of the regular army.”

⁶ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), June 7, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 252: “Unlike Lydda and Joppa, which were mainly inhabited by Jews, Caesarea was a Hellenistic-style city with a dominant population of Gentiles. Originally a small town named Strato’s Tower, it was rebuilt on a grand style by Herod the Great, complete with a man-made harbor, a theater, an amphitheater, a hippodrome, and a temple dedicated to Caesar. There was a substantial Jewish minority there and considerable friction between the Jews and the larger Gentile community. It was fitting that it should be the place where Peter came to terms with his own prejudices and realized that human barriers have no place with the God who ‘does not show favoritism.’”

⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 251n68: “The main division in a Roman army was the *legion*, consisting of 6,000 men. These were divided into ten cohorts of 600 soldiers each. These in turn were subdivided into groups of 100 under a centurion, which groups were considered the backbone of the army. The Roman historian Polybius described centurions as “not seekers of adventure but men who can command, steady in action, reliable.”

⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 485: “A soldier had to serve between twelve and twenty years in the legions and auxiliary troops in order to advance to the rank of centurion... Since a centurion was paid well and had prospects of promotion, he could be relied upon to show a high degree of loyalty.”

word “hate” is probably not strong enough to convey how Jews felt about this guy. They *despised* people like this. Keep that in mind as the story develops.

Caesarea, just so you know, was a Roman city, built by Herod and named after Caesar.¹⁰ It was a coastal port, and so it had every form of pagan wickedness and idolatry that you could imagine.¹¹ And so you would expect this guy Cornelius to be a pagan of pagans and a polytheist like the rest of the Romans.

But look at **verse 2**. This is surprising.¹²

² [Cornelius was] a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously¹³ to the people, and prayed continually to God.

That is “the God of the Israelites” (i.e., Yahweh.) That’s unusual to say the least. That’s not what you would expect from a guy like this.¹⁴

So Cornelius was a God-fearer.¹⁵ Probably he was also a Jewish sympathizer. Jews were a minority in Caesarea; but it’s a big city. So there were a good number of Jews living there.¹⁶ And Cornelius must have come in contact with them and become familiar with their God.¹⁷

And so, this soldier, forsook those silly, Roman deities. And he feared God. And by the way, Good for him! The Roman pantheon of gods were just as sinful as humans. So perhaps he was looking for something better than Jupiter, Apollo, and Venus.¹⁸

And the Romans thought that Caesar was a god too! That’s no good either! Caesar was just as flawed as the rest of us. But the Hebrew God, Yahweh... he’s different. He’s holy. He’s righteous. He’s powerful. He’s transcendent, and yet he loves his people. He forgives them, even though they’re unworthy of his forgiveness. And so, Cornelius became a devout, God-fearing, Jewish sympathizer.¹⁹ He’s even more God-fearing than some circumcised Jews that lived at this time.²⁰

But here’s the thing. And this is something that God is going to make clear to him. He’s still unsaved. He doesn’t know Christ. He fears God, but he’s an enemy of God until he believes in the Son of God.

Look at **verse 3**.

¹⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 485: “Caesarea had the typical infrastructure of a Roman provincial capital, which included a marketplace (*agora*), a theater which could seat 3,500 spectators, and a large amphitheater which was larger than the Colosseum in Rome. The seat of the Roman governor of the province of Judea, the *praetorium*, was located in Herod’s palace. The large harbor complex played an important role in international shipping. Numerous large warehouses had been built to store wheat, wine and other goods before being loaded on the ships. Caesarea had about 30,000 inhabitants, mostly Syrian Greeks, some Samaritans, Roman soldiers, and a large Jewish minority. Most Greek and Roman deities were worshiped in Caesarea. An inscription confirms that Pontius Pilate erected a temple dedicated to Tiberius.”

¹¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 485n2237: “There is evidence for the worship of Aphrodite, Apollo, Artemis Ephesia, Asclepius, Astarte, Demeter, Dionysos, Horus, Isis, Sarapis, Tyche, Zeus, a river god (Nilus-Sarapis, or Euthenia/Isis/Tyche), and the imperial cult.”

¹² JOHANN SPANGENBERG: “Isn’t it strange that a Gentile, a soldier, is God-fearing, gentle and prayerful?” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 134.

¹³ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 227: “Alms-giving was a characteristic of Jewish piety, but in this case, it was alms-giving from a Gentile to a Jew.”

¹⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 386: “This openness to Judaism would be rare among such soldiers.”

¹⁵ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 227: “Cornelius feared God, which indicates that he was a God-fearer or “a proselyte of the gate.” He was not a full proselyte to Judaism, but he had given up his pagan deities; he was a Gentile seeker after the true God. People like him appear in Acts 13:16, 26; and 17:4, 17.”

¹⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 485n2234: “After the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, Titus forced 2,500 Jewish prisoners of war to fight as gladiators in the amphitheater of Caesarea.”

¹⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 386: “As a ‘God-fearer,’ Cornelius has not become a full Jewish proselyte but as a Gentile has been exposed to the God of Israel. The description means that he has responded positively to this exposure without embracing in any detailed way elements of Jewish legal practice.”

¹⁸ Sproul, *Acts*, 181: “They were called God fearers because, even though they were Gentiles, they did not believe in the gods and goddesses of Rome, or in the pantheon of Greek deities, or in any of the Oriental religions of the day. Rather, they believed in the Most High God and were faithful followers of Yahweh, the God of Israel.”

¹⁹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 227.

²⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 252: “His devotion to God put him well on the way, preparing him for receiving the gospel and for the full inclusion in God’s people that he could not have found in the synagogue.”

³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision [this is 3pm in the afternoon, so this wasn't a dream] an angel of God²¹ come in and say to him, "Cornelius."²² ⁴ And he stared at him in terror

When angels show up in the Bible, people often get terrified. And rightly so. Angels are terrifying. He might have thought, **"I'm going to die! It's my time to die! I've survived battles and war, but now I'm going to die in the presence of this angel."**

But the anger is not there to kill him. In fact, the angel has some good news.

⁴ And [Cornelius] stared at [the angel] in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?"²³ And [the angel] said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

Now interestingly, this word "memorial" (Greek: μνημόσυνον [*mnēmosynon*]) is used of grain offerings and sacrifices in the OT.²⁴ In other words, God has heard Cornelius's petitions and seen his good deeds and has decided to meet him where he's at.²⁵

I don't know what Cornelius's prayers were, but they might have been something like this: "God I know that you are there. I know that you are the real God, Yahweh of the OT. I don't believe in that silly superstitious Roman religion. I believe in you. But I'm a sinful man. I haven't kept the law, and I'm not an Israelite. I'm an uncircumcised, unclean Gentile. How can I have these sins removed? How can I be saved?" And he's seeking... seeking... seeking... the God of the universe.

And he's imitating Jewish behavior. He gives alms to the poor. That was an aspect of Jewish piety. He was praying to God and teaching his household to fear God. That was a very Jewish thing to do for this Gentile soldier. And he's right on the doorstep of salvation. But salvation is still outside his reach.²⁶

And that's when God shows up. That's when God mercifully comes down and says, **"I've made a way for you, Cornelius."**

And [the angel] said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with²⁷ one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea."

⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier [here's another God-fearing soldier in his squadron]²⁸ from among those who attended him, ⁸ and having related everything to them,²⁹ he sent them to Joppa.

Write this down as a first point from our message.

1) God **moves** Cornelius toward the salvation of his **soul** (10:1–8)

Cornelius is a seeker. Man seeks, but God finds. That's the pattern here. Cornelius has done the best that he can with the general revelation that he has received. He knows that there's one God. He knows that he should

²¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 486: "The description of the angel of God appearing to Cornelius, referenced in 10:22, 30; 11:13, underscores God's initiative in the conversion of the first Gentile in Luke's narrative."

²² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 482: "Over 60 percent of the episode [Acts 10:1–11:18] (703 of 1150 Greek words) is direct speech, which is reported for God's angel (10:3, 4–6), Jesus (10:13, 15), the Spirit (10:19–20), Cornelius (10:4, 30–33), Cornelius's men (10:22), most importantly, Peter (10:14, 21, 26, 28–29, 34–43, 47; 11:5–17), and for believers in Jerusalem (11:3, 18)."

²³ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 227: "By calling the angel 'Lord,' he recognized him to be a supernatural messenger from God."

²⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 486: "The Greek term translated as 'memorial offering' (μνημόσυνον) is used in the LXX to translate a Hebrew term (זָבַח, cf. Lev 2:2, 9, 16) which is best understood in the sense of 'invocation (by name)' in connection with the portion of the grain offering which consisted of a handful of flour mixed with oil to which incense was added (Lev 2:2) which was then burned on the altar."

²⁵ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 227n7: "Elsewhere in the New Testament, the word is used only of the act of Miriam (Mary), the sister of Lazarus and Martha, in Matthew 26:13 and Mark 14:9."

²⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 487: "The text does not suggest that Cornelius deserves God's grace as a result of his devotion and charity. He is brought within reach of the gospel of Jesus, Israel's Savior, not because of his past devotion to God as a pagan God-fearer but because of his willingness to obey the instructions of the angel, which follow (vv. 5–6), and because of his willingness to listen to Peter, the Jewish preacher (vv. 30–33)."

²⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 487n2264: "The verb ξενίζω, used here in the passive voice, means 'to be entertained as a guest, stay' (BDAG, s.v. 1)."

²⁸ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 228: "The fact that this soldier was called 'devout' shows that he was of the same spiritual state as Cornelius."

²⁹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 387: "God ensures that they will know where to go, but they are not told why they are summoned. That remains a mystery and sustains the suspense."

fear that God. But salvation isn't a matter of good works and imitation of Jewish behavior. This guy needs to get saved.³⁰ And God intervenes to bring that about.

By the way, the Bible talks about "general revelation" in **Romans 1**. People often ask about those who have never heard the name of Jesus. That's one of the most common question that people ask their pastors or unbelievers ask believers: **"What about those who have never heard the name of Jesus?"** Well, the Bible addresses that issue in **Roman 1**, by saying, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" **(1:18–20)**.

In other words, every human being should know, as a result of creation, that there is a God. As we look at the world, there are objects that are beautifully and intricately designed. The human body itself is a marvel of creation, not to mention the animals and birds and trees and plants and hills and mountains. Think about the sun, moon, stars and galaxies. Think about the billions and billions of galaxies that are so far outside of human reach that it boggles the mind. Think about the intricacies of the microscopic world where atoms and molecules and electrons and neutrons and quarks function without human control. We are surrounded by created things that cry out, **"There's a God, there's a God, there's a God, there's a God."** **Ecclesiastes 3:11** says "[God] has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart." **Psalms 14:1** says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

Unlike so many who see this general revelation and ignore God or suppress that truth in unrighteousness, Cornelius saw these things and said, **"There's a God... I want to know him."** He said, **"There is a God, and he's not one of these sinful, stupid, less-than-sovereign gods of the Roman pantheon. He's the God of the Israelites. He is a truly sovereign, truly magnificent, truly all-powerful Deity. I'll worship him. I'll pray to him. I'll give alms in his name."** Cornelius seeks; God finds.

Now let me just clarify two things about this. This is important. Some people will conclude from this story that Cornelius must have already been saved before this angel appears to him. They say, **"He's already saved, and the angel just comes here to seal the deal The angel just comes to affirm what he already believes by adding Jesus to his God-fearing belief system."** But that's not true. It defies one of the main arguments of this book. **Acts 4:12** says, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Listen, hear me on this: God-fearing is not the same as Christ-believing. Those who believe in Christ intrinsically fear God. But there are God-fearers in this world that don't believe in Christ and are unsaved.

Cornelius was a man of charity. But charity is not the same thing as conversion. Cornelius was a man of piety. But piety is not the same thing as saving faith. Faith in Christ will inevitably produce good works.³¹ But good works does not inevitably mean that a person has faith in Christ. Faith in Christ will inevitably produce fear of God, but fear of God does not inevitably mean that a person has faith in Christ.

And there are people in this world that I would categorize as "God-fearers" (e.g., Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, other world religions) that are not saved. I also believe that there are upright, God-fearing people who go to church regularly who aren't Christ-believing. And we're not going to see them in eternity. And that's because God-fearing is not the same as Christ-believing.

And so, as tempting as it is to say, **"O yeah, Cornelius is saved at the beginning of Acts 10."** The truth is he's not saved. And the reason God sent this angel to him was so that he could get him the truth he needs to

³⁰ AUGUSTINE: "Whatever, therefore, of good works Cornelius performed, whether before he believed in Christ or when he believed or after he had believed, all to be ascribed to God. Otherwise, it might be assumed that human initiative is being lifted up." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 119.

³¹ BEDE: "One does not attain faith by virtues, but rather one attains virtues by faith." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 119.

get saved. And that's why this passage is in the Bible for us, namely, to show us that God-fearing by itself falls short of salvation.

Now, let me say this as well. Another reason I think this passage is in the Bible is to show us that God rewards the seeking heart. Cornelius wasn't just a God-fearer; he was a seeker. That doesn't mean that God only saves seekers. We just saw a few weeks ago how God stopped Saul dead in his tracks. Saul was violently opposing God, killing, and imprisoning Christians. And then God showed up on the Damascus Road and said, **"enough of that... you're with me now."**

So God's not obligated to save only seekers. But one thing that we see with the Ethiopian Eunuch and now with Cornelius is that God rewards the seeking heart. As a person responds to more and more general revelation, God rewards them with the special revelation of salvation through Christ.³²

The most fascinating statement in this whole passage to me is **verse 4** where the angel says, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God" (**Acts 10:4**). Cornelius is unsaved at this point. Yet, God receives his prayers and his deeds as an act of worship, as a memorial. And God has moved by his angel to link up Cornelius with Peter and the gospel that Peter is preaching. God is going to reward Cornelius's seeking heart with the truth of the gospel. And this is consistent with what we see in the Scriptures. **Isaiah 55:6** says, **"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near"** **Jeremiah 29:13** says, **"You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart."** **James 4:8** says, **"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."** **Matthew 11:28** says, **"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** Cornelius had a seeking heart. He responded to the light that God had given him, and now God is going to give him additional light.³³

Some of you might ask, **"Well, what about election, Pastor Tony?"** What about election! I don't think that anything we see here contradicts what God has clearly stated about the election or the chosen-ness of those who are called as children of God. **John MacArthur** writes, **"Divine election and human responsibility are both the clear teaching of Scripture. Salvation is both accomplished by God and commanded of sinners. Although our limited comprehension does not allow us to harmonize them, there is no conflict in the mind of God."**³⁴ In other words, man seeks; God finds. God is sovereign; man is responsible. Cornelius responds towards the light he has already been given, and so God rewards him with more light.³⁵

And watch how God connects all of this. Write this down as the second point from our message.

2) God moves **Peter** toward the salvation of Gentiles (10:9–16)

Now this is where this passage goes in an even more surprising direction. Because you might think that the utmost priority of this passage is to relay to the reader the salvation of this guy Cornelius. Is that the message? Is that the point of **Acts 10:1–16**? Actually, no. That's just the subplot in this story.

What's the main plot? Well, let's see.³⁶ Look at **verse 9**.

⁹ *The next day as they [These three servants of Cornelius] were on their journey and approaching the city [of Joppa],*

These servants, you should notice, waste no time getting to Peter. They traveled 30-something miles in a day in a half. That's possible for soldiers who are double-timing it to get the Peter.³⁷ Or they may have been hoofing it literally with the help of horses.³⁸ Whatever the case, there's urgency here. **"We've got to find this**

³² For more on the difference between general and special revelation, see chapter 7 of Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 116–26. See also chapters 6 and 7 of Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 121–67.

³³ MacArthur, *Acts 1–12*, MNTC, 293.

³⁴ MacArthur, *Acts 1–12*, MNTC, 293.

³⁵ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 227: "although Cornelius was not yet saved, he was at least living up to the light that he had. The principle is that if a man lives up to the amount of light that he already has, God will give him more light."

³⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 381: "The hand of God appears throughout, directing the main characters. God's independent action in giving the Spirit makes clear that these Gentiles are welcome among the people of God. This theme has been prepared for throughout Luke-Acts (Luke 2:32; 3:6; 24:47; Acts 1:4–8)."

³⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 487: "They had twenty-one hours to cover this distance—for military men a performance on the road which was not easy to accomplish but possible."

³⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 387: "This is a full day's journey, probably traveling with horses."

guy, Peter! We've got to get this message from the Lord!" Salvation is at their fingertips. It's so close they can taste it.

And look what Peter's doing as they're approaching.

*Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray*³⁹ [i.e., **noontime**].

The timing of all this is not coincidental. As the very men were approaching to inquire of Peter, Peter goes up on the housetop to pray.⁴⁰ And that's where God is going to meet with him.

By the way, most Jewish homes had flat roofs. People would often congregate on top of houses. Sometimes they would go up to the roof in the hottest part of the day to relax and enjoy a cool breeze. Peter though, the Bible says, went alone to pray. He was probably looking for solitude and maybe he needed some fresh air, because Simon the tanner's house smelled like dead animal carcass.

Now let's just backtrack for a second. These messengers of Cornelius are travelling feverishly to Joppa to find Peter. Peter is up on the rooftop praying. God's about to fill Peter in on the situation. But the question I have is this: Why didn't the angel just share the gospel with Cornelius right then?⁴¹ **Why go to all this trouble to track down Peter? I mean, Peter's a busy guy. He's an apostle. He's got people to heal and people to raise from the dead!**

Couldn't the angel have just said, "Cornelius, you're a God-fearer, but you need to believe on Christ Jesus for the payment of your sins? Repent! Confess! Believe!" "Okay, now you're saved!" Couldn't the angel have done that? Absolutely, he could've. But two things: 1) God prefers to use human instruments as his gospel messengers. And 2) God wants to do a sanctifying work in Peter.⁴²

Remember when Peter went to Samaria to authenticate the spread of the gospel and the Samaritans were filled with the Spirit. God used that event to authenticate the conversion of the half Jews, the Samaritans. And he did that for the benefit of the church. The Samaritans and the Jews didn't like each other. But now they are one in Christ.

Similarly God is going to use Peter to authenticate the spread of the gospel to full-blooded Gentiles. And God is going to make them one in Christ. God is going to use this meeting of Peter and Cornelius to break down ethnic barriers, to spread the gospel, and to unify them in Christ.

And at the same time God is going to remove partiality from Peter's heart. Here's how he does it? Look at **verse 10**.

³⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 253: "Frequently in Luke-Acts God used prayer time as the opportunity for leading to new avenues of ministry [Luke 3:21f.; 6:12-16; 9:18-22, 28-31; 22:39-46; Acts 1:14; 13:1-3]. Prayer is a time for opening oneself up to God, thus enabling his leading. Visions occur frequently in Acts as a vehicle of divine leading, which illustrates that the major advances in the Christian witness are all under divine direction [Cf. 9:10, 12; 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5; 16:9-10; 18:9; 27:23, 25]. In no case is that clearer than in the present instance. Cornelius and Peter took no initiative in what transpired. Their mutual visions illustrate that all was totally under God's direction."

⁴⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 388n2: "For rooftop prayers in the OT and Judaism, see 2 Kings 23:12; Neh. 8:16; Jer. 19:13; 32:29; Zeph. 1:5; Dan. 6:10; Tob. 3:17."

⁴¹ AUGUSTINE: "And without doubt it was possible to have done everything through the instrumentality of angels, but the condition of our race would have been much more degraded if God had not chosen to make use of people as the ministers of his word to [other people]. For how could that be true which is written, 'The temple of God is holy, and that temple you are,' if God gave forth no oracles from his human temple but communicated everything that he wished to be taught to people by voices from heaven or through the ministration of angels? Moreover, love itself, which binds people together in the bond of unity, would have no means of pouring soul into soul, and, as it were, mingling them one with another, if people never learned anything from [others]." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 121-2.

⁴² MacArthur, *Acts 1-12*, MNTC, 292: "At first glance, there seems to be no reason for this delay. Certainly the angel was quite capable of delivering the gospel message to Cornelius. Although an angel will proclaim the gospel in the future (Rev. 14:6), God has chosen to work through human instruments. God also wanted Peter there to observe firsthand Cornelius's salvation. Only then would he be fully prepared to accept gentiles into the church."

¹⁰ And [Peter] became hungry⁴³ and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it,⁴⁴

So Peter's up there trying to pray, but the smell of something tasty starts wafting up on the roof overpowering the smell of dead animal carcass. **Have you ever had that happen to you when you were trying to pray? You are trying to pray and all of a sudden the fragrance of fried eggs and bacon or fresh coffee hits your nostrils. And you're like, "What was I praying about?" "I forgot."**

Well something like that happens to Peter here. And **verse 10** says
but while they were preparing [lunch], [Peter] fell into a trance

Now just like Cornelius, this happens in the middle of the day. Peter's not sleeping, and this isn't a dream. But unlike Cornelius, Luke describes this as a "trance." The word literally in Greek means **"to stand outside yourself."** It's a state of being in which consciousness is wholly or partially suspended. **This was a kind of "out of body experience."**

So God took Peter outside of himself in this trance, and here's what he showed him. Look at **verse 11**.
¹¹ *and [Peter] saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet [a sailboat "sail" if you will] descending, being let down by its four corners⁴⁵ upon the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air.*

Verse 12 harks back to Genesis (1:30; 6:20; see also Rom 1:23) when God created all the animals of the earth on the sixth day. There were animals, creeping things, and birds of the air. So just imagine this if you will. There's this sheet coming down from heaven. And there is this cornucopia of different animals coming down. It was like a Noah's ark full of animals. But instead of animals being inside the ark, they are lowered in a sheet and visible to Peter.

And then there's a voice. Look at **verse 13**.
¹³ *And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."*

Whose voice was it? We don't know. Maybe an angel? Maybe God's voice? Maybe it's the Lord Jesus because Peter calls him "Lord" in the next verse? Whatever the case, from Peter's point of view this was a voice of authority.

So just put yourself in Peter's place for a moment. Let's imagine this together. There's a sheet being let down from heaven full of earth-dwelling animals. Some of these animals were clean by Jewish standards: deer, sheep, goats, oxen, locusts, doves, etc. And some of the animals were unclean: camels, rabbits, snakes, lizards, pig, vultures, eagles, bears, lions, alligators, etc.⁴⁶ It's a virtual buffet of earth-dwelling animals to choose from. And keep in mind, you're hungry. It says right before this that Peter was hungry.

"You're hungry, Peter? Take and eat, man. God has graciously provided for you." But look what Peter says in **verse 14**.

¹⁴ *But Peter said, "By no means, Lord;*

⁴³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 254n79: "The word πρόσπεινος, used here for Peter's hunger, is only found elsewhere in first-century literature in an account about an eye doctor named Demosthenes from Laodicea... This observation is often cited in support of the medical theory for Lukan authorship, as is the occurrence of ἀρχαῖς ('corners') in v. 11, a term that is used in medical writings for the ends of bandages."

⁴⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 488: "Jews seemed to have had only two meals a day, three on the Sabbath.2278 The New Testament mentions the noon meal (ἄριστον; Matt 22:4; Luke 11:38; 14:12) and the early evening meal (dinner, supper; δεῖπνον; e.g., Luke 14:12, 17, 24; 20:46)... While Luke often refers to meals in his description of Jesus' ministry, in Acts he only (but significantly) mentions the communal meals of the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem in the temple and in private houses (2:42, 46) and in Troas (20:7, 11), the meal that Peter was about to eat in Simon's house when he had the vision in Joppe (10:10), the meals that Peter had in Cornelius's house (11:3; cf. 10:48), the debate about, among other matters, the Old Testament food laws and their continuing validity for Gentile (and Jewish?!) believers (15:19–20, 29), the vow of some Jerusalem Jews who plot to kill Paul not to eat until they have achieved their goal (23:12), and Paul's meal on the ship during the storm (27:35)."

⁴⁵ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Affire*, chapter 17, Kindle: "The four corners of the sheet in the vision correspond to the four points of the compass — north, south, east, and west."

⁴⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 255n82: "In general, unclean animals were those which showed some anomaly with reference to their species as a whole. Thus sea creatures without the usual fish scales were unclean. Four-footed beasts were considered normal if they had cloven hooves and chewed the cud. Pigs do not chew the cud and are thus unclean."

The Greek of this verse is really strong. The “by no means” statement is a strong negation.⁴⁷ He says, **“Absolutely not... Lord!” “No way... Lord!”** Do you feel the irony in that statement? **“I won’t do what you tell me to do... Lord!”**

“Well, is he “Lord” or not, Peter? Because if he’s Lord, then regardless of your religious scruples on this matter, you’ve got to do what he says!”

Peter actually said something similar in **Matthew 16** when Jesus prophesied his own death and resurrection. Peter said, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (**16:22**). That was not one of Peter’s best moments in the NT. **You don’t dictate to the Lord.** And Jesus rebuked Peter for that.

Now we’ve got something similar happening, but to a lesser degree. The Lord is telling Peter to do something that he’s never done before. And Peter says, **“By no means... Lord!”**

¹⁴ ... Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”⁴⁸

Now let me just explain why this would be so difficult for Peter. Some of you know this already. The eating of clean food (or kosher food as it’s called today) was strictly observed in Peter’s day. These were regulated in the book of **Leviticus**.⁴⁹ It was a means of separation for the people of Israel. It differentiated them from the other peoples of the world. And the idea of eating an unclean animal or even a clean animal that was lumped together with other unclean animals was abominable to Peter.⁵⁰ It was anathema.⁵¹

So let’s use our imaginations here. Try to imagine the most disgusting kind of food on planet earth. Just picture it in your mind. Now imagine that food is being dropped down from heaven and presented to you while you’re hungry, and the Lord says, “Rise and Eat.” How are you feeling about that? Are you feeling Peter’s struggle?

Some of you know that my ancestry is Scottish. My forefathers, the Macfie Clan, roamed the highlands and lowlands of Scotland with their bagpipes and their Scottish kilts. And they battled against the other Scottish clans like the MacArthurs, the MacDonalds, and the Mackenzies. And I love that stuff. I love the kilts. I love the bagpipes. I told Sanja to make sure someone plays the bagpipes at my funeral. I love all things Scottish.

But there’s one Scottish thing that I can’t get behind. There’s this Scottish dish that is absolutely repulsive to me... I’m embarrassed that my ancestors would eat that stuff... *haggis*! Yuck! Haggis is “a savory pudding containing sheep’s pluck (heart, liver and lungs)... encased in the animal’s stomach.” If the Lord dropped down a sheet full of haggis to me and said, “Rise and eat,” I would probably say, “By no means, Lord.”

Now I know someone’s going to come up to me after service and says, “I love Haggis; how come you don’t like that stuff?” Okay, well think of something else then. Think Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom kind of stuff with chilled monkey brains and roasted beetles. Imagine a sheet full of that cuisine

⁴⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 490: “The adverb translated as ‘certainly not’ (μῆδαμὼς), which occurs in the New Testament only here and in 11:8, states a decisive negative reaction.”

⁴⁸ JOHN DONNE: “What God meant by saying nothing is unclean is that the Gentiles generally—in particular this centurion Cornelius—were not incapable of the gospel or unfit for his ministry.” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 137.

⁴⁹ See Leviticus 11:1–47 and Deuteronomy 14:1–21. Leviticus 11:46–47 is key, and is representative of Peter’s mentality: “This is the law about beast and bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms on the ground, to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten.”

⁵⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 255n83: “Although no evidence suggests that clean animals were defiled by mere contact with unclean animals, one would assume Peter’s reaction was provoked by his sheer disgust at so many unclean animals making any further discrimination impossible. Possibly *only* unclean animals were in the sheet.”

⁵¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 389: “In the OT, there are a few places where someone is asked to do something offensive or illegal (Gen. 22:1–2 [Abraham to sacrifice Isaac]; Hos. 1:2–3 [Hosea to marry a harlot]; Isa. 20:2–3 [Isaiah to go naked for three years]). Note that in each case the person is to do what is presented. This observation will become important in sorting out the vision’s point... By rejecting this call to eat, Peter believes he is being obedient to God. Peter responds as a faithful Jew and notes that to agree to eat all these unclean things would be a violation of the law (Lev. 10:10; 20:25; Ezek. 4:14; Dan. 1:8–12; 2 Macc. 5:27; 6:18–25 [a rather vivid account of a Jew refusing to eat pork]).”

being dropped down from heaven with a command from the Lord, “Take and eat.” That’s pretty close to what Peter was feeling when God told him to eat of the unclean animals. Peter’s like, “Yuck. I would never eat this stuff, Lord.”

But it’s even worse than that for Peter. Because the thought of eating these animals was not only physically repulsive; it was also morally repulsive to him. As a Jew he had maintained strict standards of a Jewish, kosher diet from his youth. Look at his response again,

¹⁴ ... “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”

In other words, **“I would never dishonor you or your Word by eating things that you have deemed common or unclean.”**

Now watch how God responds. This is an object lesson.⁵² This isn’t really about food.⁵³ Look at **verse 15.**

¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean,⁵⁴ do not call common.”

What Peter doesn’t completely understand yet is that those patterns of cleanness and uncleanness from the OT are *discontinued* by the blood of Jesus. Jesus’s resurrection is a total gamechanger. A new day has dawned on planet earth... a new determination for clean and unclean.⁵⁵

At one time, in the OT, Jews were drawing Gentiles into the kingdom of God through assimilation to Judaism. And circumcision and food laws and animal sacrifices were the gatekeepers to the kingdom. But now, God’s bringing his kingdom to the world. And there’s only one gatekeeper. Christ is the gatekeeper.

And the only thing that makes a person clean in this NT era is... wait for it... faith in Jesus Christ.⁵⁶ That’s the principle that the Lord is trying to drive home with Peter. And he uses this bizarre and extravagant vision from heaven to get through to this beloved apostles.⁵⁷

And look at **verse 16.**

¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Things often happen in threes with Peter. Have you ever noticed that? It’s like Peter’s the kind of guy who needs to learn from repetition.⁵⁸

So just imagine this with me for a moment. God says, **“Rise, Peter; kill and eat.”** Peter says, **“By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”** God says, **“What God has made clean, do not call common.”**

Then a second time God says, **“You heard me, Peter, Rise kill and eat.”** Peter says, **“By no means, Lord; My record in this matter is impeccable. I’ve have never dirtied myself or besmirched my character by eating something common or unclean.”** God says, **“Peter, what God has made clean, do not call common.”**

⁵² Sproul, *Acts*, 183: “Peter’s vision was not about food or animals; it was about people. Through the remainder of Acts 10 Luke will show why God repealed the dietary laws. It was to show that the unclean were being gathered together and made clean by Christ.”

⁵³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 390: “The food laws underscore Israel’s separation from the nations. By making unclean food clean, God is showing how table fellowship and acceptance of Gentiles are more easily accomplished in the new era. The vision symbolizes that what separated Jews from Gentiles is now removed, as Peter will explain in Acts 10:28... God uses the picture of unclean food now made clean to portray unclean Gentiles now made clean.”

⁵⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 491: “The verb ‘made clean’ (ἐκαθάρισεν) is the term used in the LXX for the pronouncements of the priests concerning persons which had been impure and which, after the appropriate purification, were then declared clean (cf. Lev 13:6, 13, 17).”

⁵⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 389–90: “The vision, whether a parable or a command about food, shows the arrival of a new era and is not just about diet (Acts 10:28–29). Midrash Psalms 146 §4 (268) says that in the future (i.e., in the days of Messiah) God will declare clean all the animals that in this world are declared unclean.”

⁵⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 474: “God now grants salvation to all people irrespective of ethnic or religious background.”

⁵⁷ JOHANN SPANGENBERG: “What are unclean animals other than the idolatrous pagans? What is butchering unclean animals other than to preach the gospel to pagans, unconcerned about the law, circumcision and the like? No longer is it, ‘I am sent to no one other than the lost sheep of the house of Israel alone,’ but now, ‘Go forth into all the world and preach the gospel to all creatures.’” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 136.

⁵⁸ JOHN CALVIN: “Peter would never have dared to open the gate of heaven to the Gentiles, unless God himself had removed the wall and thrown open a plain way and entrance for all.... But now God has made common to the whole world the covenant of life, which he had deposited in one nation as if it were hidden treasure.” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 136–7.

Now, a third time. Let's try this one more time. **"Peter! Rise, kill and eat."** Peter says, **"I can't do it, Lord. I can't do it. Those animals are disgusting! They are unclean! They are common!"** God says, **"Peter, one more time, what I have made clean, do not call common."**

And then, without any conclusion to the matter, the sheet just goes back to heaven. Peter doesn't eat. He doesn't get struck dead for disobeying the Lord. Peter is just left to ponder the whole thing.⁵⁹ And the story continues. And we'll pick it up next week right here where this leaves us.

So what do we make of this? What is all this about? And what does the vision of animals from heaven have anything to do with Cornelius? Well, Luke will connect the dots for us in the verses that follow. But even now, we can make some preliminary observations and applications about the text.

Let me give you three. Write these down. What was God teaching Peter in this moment? What is God teaching us from this text? Here's one thing. Write this down. You've heard me say this before.

1) The ground is **level** at the foot of the **cross**

In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female. Why? Because we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).

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're from a big city or a small city or a big town or a small town. It doesn't matter what side of the tracks you grew up on. It doesn't matter where you went to school. It doesn't matter what level of education you have. It doesn't matter who your mama is. It doesn't matter. Jesus Christ came to eliminate any and all racial, cultural, political, social, and educational barriers to the gospel.

Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth." Jesus said, "Go to all the nations and baptize disciples." So far in Acts, the gospel has spread throughout Jerusalem, Judea, and even half-Jewish Samaria. But now the last dam is going to break. Now the gospel is really going to accelerate. Acts 10 is something like five years after Jesus's death and resurrection. It's taken a little while to get here. But now the Gentile world is going to be open to the gospel.

What does that mean for us in twenty-first century America in a room full of mostly Gentiles? It means this. Anyone and everyone can put their faith in Christ. Red or yellow; black or white. Young or old. Rich or poor. American, European, African, Asian. The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

And our faith, by the way, is a uniting faith. Write this down as a second application.

2) Christianity and **partiality** are mutually **exclusive**

One of the greatest threats to the mission of the church is partiality. It's parochialism. It's an attitude that favors us over them. And it looks with suspicion on others.

Now partiality takes many forms. Some partiality is based on the color of your skin. Some partiality is based on which side of the tracks you grew up on. Some partiality is based on which school you went to, or what educational background you have, or what city you're from, or what kind of job you have—blue collar or white collar. All of these questions create sub-cultures and interest groups in our world which are irrelevant when it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And the mission that Christ gave the church is an impartial mission: "you go be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth." It's impartial, because in Christ, we are all one. Jesus prayed to the Father, "May [they] all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us" (John 17:21).⁶⁰

Now I'm going to linger on this point just a little longer, because I believe the great hope for our world and for the battle against partiality is the gospel. We live in a world that is constantly trying to divide. There's racism in our world. There's prejudice. There's xenophobia. There's favoritism. And one

⁵⁹ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 17, Kindle: "Once he really understood what it all meant, Peter would never forget this strange vision! In fact, he spoke of it over and over again."

⁶⁰ MacArthur, *Acts 1-12*, MNTC, 290: "Even the church is not immune to this tendency. Those of another culture, skin color, social status, educational group, or income level often find themselves as unwelcome in the church as Huck Finn was in Tom Sawyer's gang. Such intolerant exclusivism grieves the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose purpose and prayer was that believers 'may be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they may also be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me' (John 17:21)."

of the great ironies of the last ten years is that the more our country tries to battle racism, the worse the racism gets. And there's a sense in which the anti-racism and the anti-racist books that have come out in spades in the last few years are quite frankly, and ironically, racist.⁶¹

What's the cure for that? What unifies us? Well, I think it's two things. First of all, it's a biblical theology that acknowledges that all men and women are made in the image of God. They are afforded equal dignity before God because of that. That's something that the rest of the world doesn't seem to acknowledge or recognize. But more than that, unity is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ, where anyone and everyone who is made in the image of God can have their sins forgiven by Christ's blood. Christianity and partiality are mutually exclusive. And the gospel of Jesus Christ breaks down ethnic barriers.

By the way, God *does* divide the world. God *does* see the world in two categories. But he doesn't divide by race, class, gender, or nationality. God divides between saved and unsaved. There are sheep, and there are goats. And if you are a sheep, you have more in common with other sheep, even if they live on the other side of the world, even if they speak a different language than you, then you have with a goat that lives next door to you.

Here's my encouragement to you church. Go be Christ's witness. Go cross a culture to share the love of Jesus with another person. Don't show partiality. Don't show favoritism. Don't be ethnocentric. Don't be exclusivist. Don't keep the gospel locked up inside your own little holy huddle. Let's get it out to the world.

Finally, here's a third application point.

3) God makes the **unclean clean**

Some of you might remember that Jesus addressed the issue that Peter is dealing with here in Acts 10. Look what Jesus said in Mark 7:18–23. “Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”⁶² Jesus didn't want to just reform the outside of a person. He wanted to reform the inside. He wanted to go after the heart.⁶³

I know some people struggle sometimes with whether or not the kosher laws are still in effect. There might be some people who struggle with that. Pastor Tony, “Can we eat pork? Can we eat shellfish, crab, and lobster?” Absolutely! Knock yourselves out!

“Pastor Tony, can we eat gluten?” Absolutely, you can! Amber waves of grain! Eat it to the glory of God. Or don't eat it to the glory of God. You have liberty in Christ Jesus to eat or not to eat. That's not what makes you clean or unclean.⁶⁴

Jesus said this, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (5:17). In other words, the OT law was good and purposeful in its time. God used it to differentiate his people from the world. But now Christ has fulfilled the law.⁶⁵

⁶¹ The best example of this is Robin DiAngelo's misguided *White Fragility* (Boston: Beacon, 2018). Similarly Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: Penguin, 2023).

⁶² See also Matthew 15:16–20 and Romans 14:14 with their surrounding contexts. See also 1 Timothy 4:3–4 and 1 Corinthians 10:19.

⁶³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 255–6: “In Mark 7 Jesus' teaching on clean/unclean was immediately followed by his ministry to a Gentile woman (7:24–30), just as Peter's vision regarding clean and unclean foods was followed by *his* witness to a Gentile. It is simply not possible to fully accept someone with whom you are unwilling to share in the intimacy of table fellowship. The early church had to solve the problem of kosher food laws in order to launch a mission to the Gentiles. Purity distinctions and human discrimination are of a single piece.”

⁶⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 255: “Some scholars feel that Peter's vision dealt more with food laws than with interaction with Gentiles. This is to overlook the fact that the two are inextricably related. In Lev 20:24b–26 the laws of clean and unclean are linked precisely to Israel's separation from the rest of the nations.”

⁶⁵ IRENAEUS: “At that time Peter saw a vision in which a heavenly voice answered him, ‘What God has cleansed, you must not call common.’ For the God who had distinguished through the law the pure food from the impure, that same God had cleansed the nations through the blood of his Son, and that is the God whom Cornelius worshiped.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 128.

And what differentiates the people of God from the world today is not our diet; it's our faith in Christ. Cleanness in the church age is not a matter of dietary laws or temple protocol or animal sacrifices.⁶⁶ Cleanness is determined, it's appropriated to us, through in Christ.⁶⁷

And by the way, all of us are born unclean; Jews and Gentiles both. All of us are tarnished by sin. Romans 5:8 says this, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." **Through faith in Christ, God makes the unclean clean.**

⁶⁶ Sproul, *Acts*, 183: "We all start this life unclean, and in some respects we are still unclean, but if we have confessed Christ and put our hope and trust in Him alone for salvation, then He is in us and we are in Him. If that relationship exists in your life right now, do not let anybody call you unclean, because God has declared you clean. That is what justification is all about."

⁶⁷ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 17, Kindle: "Dr. H. A. Ironside said that when his father died, this passage was running through his father's mind, and he kept repeating, 'A great sheet and wild beasts, and . . . and . . . and . . .'. When he could not get the words out, he started over but stalled once more at the same place. Finally a friend bent over and whispered, 'John, it says, 'creeping things.' 'Oh yes,' he said, 'that is how I got in. Just a poor, good-for-nothing creeping thing, but I got in.'"