

Acts 10:24-29

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Peter Tells the Gentiles that He, a Jew, No Longer Sees Gentiles as Unclean
Peter arrives at Cornelius's house. Cornelius has gathered his friends and family to hear Peter speak. Peter points out that it is unlawful for a Jew to become friends with or visit a Gentile's house, but that God had recently taught him to never again consider non-Jewish people as uncommon or unclean. This was the meaning of the vision of the animals. He asks Cornelius why he was summoned to his house.

Peter has departed from Joppa at the command of the Holy Spirit to meet a Roman centurion, a Roman army officer, named Cornelius. Two servants and a soldier in service to Cornelius are traveling with him from Joppa to Caesarea.

Joppa is a town on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, while Caesarea is another seaside city about 30 miles north of Joppa ([see map](#)). Caesarea was a large, busy hub of trade and transport during the first century, a gateway from Europe into the Middle East. It was the primary seat of government for the Roman governor of Judaea. Accordingly we can infer that Cornelius was a highly regarded Roman officer.

On the following day, the day after leaving Joppa, Peter entered the city of Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends (v. 24). Being a believer and fearer of God, Cornelius is excited for the arrival of this man Simon Peter (v. 5). Through an angel, God told Cornelius to send for Peter in Joppa.

While *waiting* in the days since, Cornelius has doubtless been wondering with great interest what this man whom God was sending to him would say or do. He expected it to be something important, something worth hearing, and he wanted to share the moment with his *relatives and close friends*, so that they might be blessed too by what was to happen. Cornelius's relatives would also have been Gentiles, as would have been his *close friends*. His household also believed in God (v. 2), so his servants and family members were doubtless waiting with great anticipation as well.

When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him (v. 25). It is an excessive, perhaps somewhat inappropriate reaction, from our perspective. But this shows the anticipation of Cornelius, and the extent to which he had already decided to follow whatever God's messenger told him.

To fall and worship is not uncommon in the Bible when men are overwhelmed with religious fervor or a supernatural encounter. Even the Apostle John, who knew Jesus and was a close friend to Him, fell down and worshipped an angel in the midst of a vision of the end times, and the angel promptly corrected him to worship God alone (Revelation 22:8-9). As does Peter here with Cornelius, *But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man" (v. 26).*

At this point, Peter appears to understand the vision he experienced days before (Acts 10:10-16). Perhaps he understood it on the road to Caesarea, or the moment the Roman servants came to his house in Joppa. Peter does not look down on Cornelius, nor does he take advantage of the man's genuflecting. It was a strange thing for a former fisherman from the backwater region of Galilee to have a Roman centurion bow to him. But Peter raises Cornelius up to his level, "*I too am just a man.*"

Peter had walked on water, had been a student to the Son of God, had spoken in languages he never knew before, had healed the sick, and just recently raised a woman from the dead in Joppa. He might have felt the temptation toward elitism, toward pride, to have a Roman centurion bow to him. Cornelius was a Roman officer in the headquarters of the occupying power in Israel at the time, so from a human standpoint, he had a greatly elevated status. But Cornelius understood that in the spiritual dimension Peter had superior authority. This confirms the assertion that Cornelius was a righteous man.

Peter knew all that he had done was by the power of Christ, and that he *too* was *just a man* whom God had called, whom God had saved, and whom God used now as an instrument for His good will. God had prepared him for this moment by sending him the vision of the unclean animals, declaring them clean and no longer unholy (v. 15). Peter now understood that this "unholy, unclean" Gentile was called to be "made holy and clean" as a part of Jesus's kingdom.

Cornelius had fallen at Peter's feet in the doorway of his home, immediately after he had entered the house. *As Peter talked with him, and entered further into the house, he found many people assembled* (v. 27). He had probably not expected such a crowd, only being told that he was to meet a man named Cornelius. But Peter takes advantage of the moment.

Peter has addressed larger crowds, such as the many thousands in Jerusalem at Pentecost years earlier (Acts 2:41). But this was a crowd of Gentiles, *assembled* in the house of a Roman commander. The *relatives* and *close friends* of *Cornelius* waited to hear what he had to say. So Peter speaks. He reveals the recent lesson God has taught him through the vision of the forbidden animals on the cloth lowered from heaven.

And he said to the people assembled there, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. (v. 28)

Though they were all apparently Gentile Romans gathered there, they had lived in Israel long enough to know how the Jewish people set themselves apart in an attempt to keep their culture and religion pure and holy, not mingling it with the common, corrupt ways of the world (Deuteronomy 14:2). The Romans knew how *unlawful it was for a man who is a Jew* such as Peter *to associate with a foreigner or to visit him*.

Peter is explaining how he is breaking Jewish custom, even Law, to *associate* with men whom his people consider *foreigners* (and invaders). To even *visit* a foreigner in his house was unheard of. But Peter had come all the same, and he explains why, understanding the strange vision he

had seen two days before, “*and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for*” (v. 28-29).

Peter was letting go of the trappings of elitism and prejudice that had crept into Jewish culture at the time. It was true that God had chosen the Jews to be His people, and had called them to live apart from the world. God had not meant for the Jews to be a hermit nation, to isolate itself with a superiority complex. God’s purpose for setting apart a specific nation of people was so that they would be priests to the rest of the world, pointing the human race back to God by living in fear and obedience to Him, showing the other nations how to love their neighbor as themselves, rather than exploit one another (Exodus 19:6, Isaiah 42:6).

The Bible is replete with indications that God has been calling all peoples back to Him since the fall of man and the banishment from Eden (Isaiah 19:19-25, 56:6-8, Jonah 3:7-10, Daniel 4:34-35, Genesis 15:16, 2 Kings 5:17). The Apostle Paul states this plainly when preaching the gospel to the Athenians, telling them,

“He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’”
(Acts 17:26-28)

The Book of Ruth is the story of a Moabite (Gentile) woman led to follow the God of the Israelites by the example of her Jewish mother-in-law Naomi. Rahab the Canaanite (Gentile) chose the God of Israel and lived, while the rest of Jericho and its inhabitants were destroyed. Both Ruth and Rahab were honored by God by being included in the lineage of Christ (Matthew 1:5). The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar (Gentile) and the Persian ruler Darius (Gentile) both worshipped Yahweh as the Living God. In God’s promise to Abraham, He said that all the nations would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3).

Now Peter is understanding that the good news of salvation from sin and death has come to all people, and he is to minister to them. The good news is that God has made a way of reconciliation back to Him, inviting all descendants of Adam and Eve to reconcile with Him, not only the Jewish people. Peter now understood that his vision was not so much about what animals he could now eat, it was *God* showing him *that he should not call any man unholy or unclean*. Peter needed to set aside his cultural bias, and look at the intrinsic value of the humans to whom God had sent him to minister.

Peter’s heart had to change before this moment could happen. God was preparing him to no longer look at the Gentiles as “other” or “outside the tent.” God was going to redeem people from all nations. No one was to be overlooked. God sent Jesus to redeem the entire world, because He loved the entire world
(Colossians 2:14, John 3:16).

Peter witnessed Jesus speak of this worldwide reach of salvation during His ministry, though it had clearly not fully sunk in until now. One example Peter had observed involved a different Roman centurion displaying faith in Jesus, such strong faith that it impressed Jesus, for it was greater faith than any Israelite had shown Jesus in His life on earth to that point,

“Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”

(Matthew 8:10-11)

Here Jesus foretold that “many will come from east and west” to sit at “the table,” which was to say foreigners and Gentiles like the Roman centurion (from the west) would sit at the table of honor at the feast of His coronation when He takes His throne on earth, as prophesied. It will not only be Jews sitting at the seats of honor, but men and women from all over the world, east and west of Israel, to sit among the most revered followers of God, such as the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Now Peter begins to understand the fullness of the ministry of the gospel, the fullness of the Great Commission given by Christ before His return to Heaven (Matthew 28:18-20). God is opening the gospel to all peoples. Peter is telling Cornelius and his guests, “I am just a man, and God has taught me to see all people as He sees them. *That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for.* I did not resist or complain. I don’t look down on any of you. I come as an equal, without hostility or superiority, as a man who also fears God.”

He then asks the obvious question, *So I ask for what reason you have sent for me* (v. 29).

“Why have you called me here? What would you like to know?” Peter is not here to be served, Peter is here to serve, just as His Lord taught him (John 13:12-17).

Biblical Text

²⁴ On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. ²⁶ But Peter raised him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am just a man.” ²⁷ As he talked with him, he entered and *found many people assembled. ²⁸ And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. ²⁹ That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me.”