

The Impartial God – Acts 10:23-35

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Introduction

1. The section of Acts before us is of monumental importance to basic paradigm of the church.
 - a. If the church is the fulfillment of all that God promised to His saints in the Old Testament, then the church is the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) and the true sons of Abraham (Galatians 3:7-9).
 - b. The New Covenant era of the church began on the day of Pentecost. From that time until Peter preaches the gospel to Cornelius (Acts 10) the church was largely Jewish in character.
 - c. God promised Abraham that his descendants would be the vehicle whereby God would bless all the nations of the world (Genesis 12:2, 3; Galatians 3:13, 14). Peter is literally the vanguard of God's fulfilling this promise.
 - d. Gentiles will come to faith and be joined to Christ's body in their own right. No longer will they be required to proselyte as Jews. They will stand as equals in the New Covenant community.
 - e. From this time forward, the character of the church will also change drastically. Multitudes of Jews were added to the Lord, but now Gentiles will greatly surpass the Jews so that by the end of the first century, the church will be largely Gentile in character.
 - f. There will be considerable strain as many Jews will resist the Gentile expansion, requiring Gentile converts to conform to Jewish rites and practices, even after the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). Paul's letters are filled with references to this problem.
2. The Lord prepared for this transition supernaturally, giving visions to Cornelius, a god-fearing Gentile of Roman descent, and to Peter, a Hebrew of Hebrews with respect to Jewish laws of purity and separation.
3. Peter's vision of unclean animals and God's command to kill and eat was not really about food. The lesson of the vision is that what God *made* clean must no longer be considered unclean. God was not contradicting his original code, which served its purpose in history. The New Covenant, in replacing the Old, made many things obsolete.
4. Though these things were very perplexing to Peter, the Spirit's directed of every detail to bring about the transition. Peter obediently followed the Spirit's instruction.
5. The gospel's extension to the Gentiles should not have been a cause for Jewish alarm, however. The gospel was never intended to be exclusively for Israel. Israel was to serve as God's messengers to bring the word of salvation to the ends of earth (Isaiah 49:6; Acts 13:47).

I. Peter's Introduction

A. An unseemly gesture (vv. 23-29)

1. Cornelius' reception of Peter seems very inappropriate. Surely, he understood of God's prohibition against idolatry, therefore, the gesture should be viewed as merely an act of honor and submission, not worship.

2. No doubt, the anticipation of Peter's coming and his status as an apostle contributed to Cornelius' action. Peter was just a man. Perhaps this was another test for Peter—how he would react. The messenger was nothing in himself, but only suitable as God's Spirit made him so.
3. Peter also needed to overcome his inappropriate prejudice of and contempt for Gentiles. Formerly, he would have regarded Cornelius as unclean and unworthy. Peter would have staunchly refused to enter his house. However, the Spirit clearly instructed him that he must call no man unclean.

B. An anticipated blessing (vv. 30-33)

1. A large group of friends and relatives of Cornelius were gathered to hear what Peter had to tell them. This demonstrates the character of the man and his influence on others. They waited, who knows how long, for Peter to arrive, intent to hear all that Peter would tell them.
2. Luke's reporting of Cornelius' vision again is not meant to be tedious repetition, but evidence of the importance of that event. The vision was not intended solely for Cornelius only. God was about to save him and many others at the same time. It would not stop there but continue through-out the gospel age.

II. Peter's New Conviction

A. The unprecedented declaration (v. 34)

1. Peter, empowered by the Spirit, opened his mouth (reminiscent of a prophet) to declare truth. This truth was not a new revelation; but it was a new understanding of truth to Peter.
2. God is God. He is the creator and Lord of all. Everyone falls under His sovereign rule, which He executes upon all flesh regardless of who they are or what they can offer Him.
3. The Israelites tended to assume a privileged people, distinguished and entitled above all peoples. True, God chose Israel to be His peculiar people, but it had nothing to do with them, personally. Their choice had nothing to do with what God saw in them, but solely His sovereign self-originating, and uncompelled love.

B. The perplexing condition (v. 35).

1. A casual reading of the text may lead one to conclude that God requires human righteousness as a means to earn access to Him.
2. The facts of Scripture clearly teach that God does not reward men with salvation because they live devout and holy lives.
3. For all Cornelius' righteousness, prayer, and alms-giving, God did not accept his person. The angel merely acknowledged that God observed his devotion, but he needed to send for Peter who could tell him about the one thing he lacked, faith in Jesus Christ. Without Christ's salvation, Cornelius was lost and condemned.

III. Moses' Exhortation (Deuteronomy 10:12-22)

A. God's expectation of Israel (vv. 12-15)

1. They were to fear the Lord, walk in all His ways, to love Him and serve Him with all their heart and soul, and keep His commandments and statutes.

2. The basis of His expectation is:
 - a. He is God and owns the heavens, the earth, and all that is in them.
 - b. In His unconditional, sovereign love, He chose the fathers above all peoples.
3. This information appears to make God to prefer Israel above other peoples. This would be a misunderstanding, so to prevent this wrong assumption, Moses sets forth an explanation.

B. God's requirement of His people (vv. 16-22)

1. Circumcision of the flesh is not enough; they must have circumcised hearts (regeneration) because they are stubborn with respect to sin.
2. Being God, He is not partial and will never be influenced by a bribe.
3. To prove this, God takes care of those who could never influence Him otherwise; widows, orphans, and sojourners, giving them the necessities of life.
4. If one is truly circumcised, he will act like God, showing no partiality and caring for the needy because they also were needy at time.
5. They make the Lord their praise—He is their God and He has done everything for them. They cannot take credit for anything. What they are now, they owe to God's gracious work in and for them.

Lessons

1. Christians tend to regard themselves more highly than others. They see themselves as somehow privileged because God has chosen them for Himself. This was the mistake of the Jews.
2. Jesus' lesson in Luke 17:7-10 is very appropriate to us here.
3. My prayer has been that God would teach me how to love Him, which means how I should give myself away for the sake of Christ and others. Believers, in America, have been duped by Satan into believing that the church should serve them. Those days are about to be over and the genuine saints will be distinguished from the mere professors when called upon to give themselves up for Christ and His glory.