

Ignored and Misunderstood Scriptures ([Ac 10:34-35](#))

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Dear Friends,

If we read most other written material as many sincere believers read and interpret their Bibles, we would not understand much of anything that we read. The essential basis for right and logical grammatical interpretation of written material builds on the foundation of a contextual interpretation. You don't read one clause or one sentence, or even one paragraph for that matter, in isolation. You interpret the writing in the greater literary context in which it appears. Consistent and right interpretation considers a growing spiral of context, from the whole sentence to the whole paragraph, to the whole chapter, to the whole letter or document, to other writings by the same person, to the whole book, Old or New Testament, and eventually to a harmony of the whole Bible.

If we respect our Bible as a supernatural document, inspired, as well as preserved by the Lord as His timeless message to His people, we must hold its teachings in high regard. (As [Ps 12:6-7](#) affirms. "*Thou shalt keep them* (The pure words of the Lord, Verse 6), *O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.*") Paul affirms this same truth in [2Ti 3:16-17](#), "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable....*" Many contemporary believers rewrite this verse to say that "All scripture was given by inspiration," but God didn't bother to continue His involvement in its preservation, so careless translators and scribes have muddled the message. I believe these words as they appear in the Biblical record. Not only did God direct the precise message of Scripture, but He has preserved it across centuries, cultures, and languages, so that the Bible we have today remains God's message to His people. Without apology, in this reference, I refer to the King James Bible in the English language. It holds a high record over four centuries for its influence on the English-speaking Christian community that is unmatched by any other English translation of the Bible, followed closely by the Geneva Bible, translated into the English language a few years prior to the King James.

Luke's detailed description in a rather lengthy chapter of Acts of Cornelius and his household claims our high attention. To ignore this whole chapter and attempt to frame our ideas on one clause, isolating it from its context, cannot respect the teaching the Lord imbedded in this lengthy lesson in Acts.

Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them. ([Isa 34:16](#) KJV)

Lord bless,

Joe Holder

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Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. ([Ac 10:34-35](#) KJV 1900) How many times have you heard someone who believes in salvation by works partially quote this passage, honestly thinking they refuted the doctrine of salvation wholly of God? They will quote only one brief clause, "God is no respecter of persons," ignoring the context in which these words appear. In fact, read and interpreted in its context, this clause teaches a truth almost mirror opposite what these people think. Let's examine the lesson in its context and learn what it can teach us. In the broad panorama of Acts, the Lord called Paul, an intellectual Pharisee, to be His apostle to the Gentiles, and He called Peter to be His apostle to Jews. However, Paul often appears in Acts in synagogues, reasoning with Jewish people. And this lesson reveals Peter, sent by the Lord to teach a Gentile, an officer in the Roman army at that. I love the Lord's habit of surprising us with the unexpected, especially because He brings a good outcome from that unexpected. In the context of this lesson,

Peter's surprise at a Gentile not only believing in Jesus, but also manifesting the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit that he and the other apostles experienced and witnessed in other believers on Pentecost (Precisely described in [Ac 2:6-12](#)) prompted his response recorded in our study verses. If we follow this whole context, Peter's "God is no respecter of persons" means that Peter discovered what he had not previously considered possible—that God's special grace was not restricted to Jewish people only. He poured out the same powerful grace on a Roman officer and his believing household that He gave to the Jewish apostles. However, the Holy Spirit invested far richer truth in this lesson for our instruction. But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. People in "every nation," not Jewish people only, are blessed with God's loving grace. Often the people who quote this isolated clause, "God is no respecter of persons," believe that a person must fear God and work righteousness to gain their salvation. No fear of God and no righteousness, and they readily pronounce the person not saved. "Is accepted," in either contemporary English or in first century Greek, identifies a present reality, not a possible but uncertain potential. Peter did not indicate that fearing God and working righteousness caused a person to be accepted with God, but rather that fearing God and working righteousness manifests that the person is already accepted with Him. Cornelius and his believing house presently feared God and presently worked righteousness when Peter declares his observation. They were also presently "accepted with him." Peter didn't tell Cornelius he and his house must pray the sinner's prayer, be baptized, or do other things to become accepted of God. He announced, as much to himself as to others, his surprising conclusion. They were already accepted of the Lord. His basis for this conclusion was the evidence; Cornelius and his believing house feared God and worked righteousness. Rather than teaching salvation by works, Peter claimed Cornelius' and his household's works as evidence that they were already saved. As the Biblical record affirms, Peter's preaching was the first time Cornelius and his household had heard the gospel, so were they saved before they heard Peter preach to them? We can answer the question by the Biblical evidence in the inspired record. There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. ([Ac 10:1-2](#) KJV 1900) This is the first appearance of Cornelius or his household in the Biblical record. Prior to Peter preaching to them or to their believing Peter's preaching, how does Luke describe this Roman officer and his household? 1. He was a devout man. 2. He feared God. 3. "...all his house" likewise was devout and feared God. 4. He gave of his substance to care for the poor. 5. He prayed, and not to a pagan idol; he "prayed to God always." If you were to describe Cornelius and his household from the description Luke gives of him in [Ac 10:1-2](#), how would you describe them? The record states that they feared God. Cornelius and his household met Peter's first description, "he that feareth him." He was devout, he gave to the poor, and he prayed to God "always." Without question, we must conclude that Cornelius and his household also worked righteousness. Therefore, whatever conclusion Peter drew of them in [Ac 10:35](#), by the Biblical description of him and his household, was equally true in [Ac 10:1](#). From [Ac 10:2](#) forward, we read that the Lord sent an angel to tell Cornelius that his prayers were answered, and he was to send to a certain city and ask for a certain man, Peter, who would guide him to the right way of faith and life. At the same time, the Lord appeared to Peter and started preparing Peter for a life transforming change in his own way of thinking about Jesus and the gospel. In [Lu 22:32](#), Jesus told Peter of a future occasion when he would be "Converted." When this "Conversion" occurred, the Lord charged Peter to "Strengthen thy brethren." Share his personal conversion of whatever sort it was with other believers. It is my belief, shared by many, that Peter's "Conversion" related to his experience with Cornelius. For the first time in his faith life Peter realized that the Lord's kind grace was not an exclusive privilege of Jewish believers. Further, Peter came to understand that Gentiles did not need to become Jews through a proselyte process to be Christians. God's saving and blessing grace did not "Respect persons," their nationality or social status. The remainder of Peter's sentence after "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" makes the contextual and gospel point the Holy Spirit intended by this lesson.

God's saving and blessing grace does not flow through a racial or social filter, falling only on Jewish believers. God's grace doesn't require His children to become surrogate Jews to gain access to His blessings. Regardless their race, social status, or any other superficial distinction they might claim, God has a people "...out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." ([Re 5:9b](#)) So the correct interpretation of "God is no respecter of persons" affirms the breadth of God's election and His saving grace, a far greater truth than the errant interpretation that ignores this context. God never saved only Jews, or any other finite cultural group for that matter. John's description of the people he saw when he looked into heaven, likely late in the first century. He did not see an isolated race or culture then, did he? [Re 5:9](#) affirms Peter's true intent. In some Reformed circles a form of "Surrogate" faith is believed. If parents are faithful believers, their children will also be elect. As I can sense their reasoning, they base this belief on God's covenant with Old Testament Israel and on the "Household" verses in Acts. However, a careful reading of these passages from Acts will affirm that the members of these households were also godly, believing people, so they were elect and manifested their salvation by faith and godliness the same as their heads. God's salvation is based on "Grace, not race." It is also not based on your employer, or your family. Much of Christian teaching in our day confuses salvation's cause with its effects. You hear much teaching about what you must do to secure your "Real salvation," rather than the New Testament teaching that faith and godly living are evidence—not a cause or instrument—of one's ultimate or eternal salvation. Even folks who affirm "Grace" language regarding salvation occasionally teach "Back door" salvation by works instead of the simplicity that is in Jesus in the New Testament record. Cornelius is a simple and powerful example of the Biblical truth. If we accept the New Testament record of this man's spiritual experience, Luke, the inspired human writer of Acts, was directed by the Holy Spirit to include [Ac 10:1-2](#) as an affirmation that Cornelius and his household manifested the precise evidence of ultimate or eternal salvation prior to their hearing Peter preach Jesus to them. They were saved prior to hearing the gospel, not after or because they heard it. This simple truth of God's merciful saving grace is despised and rejected by many sincere Christians in our culture. They will freely quote "God is no respecter of persons" if you tell them you believe God is in charge of our salvation, not us, but they will not consider those words in the context of Peter's surprising conclusion at witnessing the evidences of salvation in Gentiles, evidences that Luke recorded with his first introduction of Cornelius, not after Peter preached to them. Tell these dear souls you believe this, and they may call you "Antinomian" and accuse you of advocating a lawless or careless moral lifestyle. No, we seek to learn and to believe the New Testament record. Salvation by God and His merciful grace is a New Testament truth. However, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity," ([2Ti 2:19b](#)) is equally a constantly affirmed Bible truth that we believe and teach. Much of the "Backdoor" salvation by works these folks advocate, I fear, grows out of a wrong motive for Christian living. They often hold to some form of rewards for "My good works and my faith" in heaven. And some of them have confessed to me; if they didn't have that potential for a reward for their good living, they would not live a godly life. If you believe wholly in God's kind grace, that your salvation is all of grace and all of God, you are overwhelmed by a sense of His love, and you long to live for Him and for His honor out of love for Him, not for a reward for yourself. What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? ([Ps 116:12](#))

Elder Joe Holder