

March 22, 2026

“Welcoming Others in Christ”
Lesson 3

Acts 10:9-15, 30-35
Galatians 3:28-29

Intro

Most Jews in the Roman Empire kept themselves apart from Gentiles, forming distinct communities in their cities. Observant Jews saw Gentiles as unclean pagans who endangered Jewish religious and moral purity. They would not eat with Gentiles nor visit their houses. But the Jewish faith drew a significant number of non-Jewish people to it. Some became proselytes, devout converts to Judaism who were circumcised and followed the Law of Moses. Other Gentiles worshiped God but did not become total converts. These people were considered faithfully devoted and were referred to as “God-fearing Gentiles”.

Read Acts 10:9-15

1. vs. 9: The word “they” refers to three men sent from Cornelius to find Peter
 - They arrive where Peter is about midday
 - At the same time they arrive, Peter is going up to the roof to pray
 - Roofs were typically flat, and could be used like an extra room
 - They were often used for storage, for worship, or for entertaining

2. vs. 10: Peter gets hungry—it’s time for the midday meal
 - Meals must be freshly prepared each time, as there is no refrigeration
 - While he is waiting, he goes into a trance
 - This trance is not connected to his hunger

3. vs. 11: Peter sees a vision: heaven opens and a sheet is lowered down, all spread out
 - Heaven opening suggests God’s presence and power
 - (See Matt. 3:13 with Jesus’ baptism and Stephen’s vision in Acts 7:56)
 - We get to see the sheet from Peter’s perspective—to see what he saw in the vision

4. vs. 12: On the sheet are “all kinds” of animals, birds, and reptiles
 - The animals are all four-footed, suggesting things like livestock
 - The text does not name any creatures specifically
 - Some were “unclean” by the Law of Moses, based on what happens in the next verses

5. vs. 13: A voice tells Peter to kill the animals and eat them
 - This voice is likely God, given the heavens opening idea from vs. 11
 - The Law of Moses instructed which animals were “clean” and which “unclean”
 - Eating, and in some cases touching, an unclean animal was forbidden
 - Jews of the time showed their commitment to God by committing to “clean” practices
 - This applied to foods eaten and also the clothes worn

They avoided Gentiles, who regularly ate and touched unclean things

6. vs. 14: Peter responds to the voice by saying “Lord”, an indication that this is God speaking
His response also verifies that some animals on the sheet were indeed unclean
Peter says he has *never* eaten anything unclean
In the OT, refusing to eat unclean food is seen as an act of faithfulness
Things which are impure or unclean are outside God’s boundaries for His people
7. vs. 15: The voice of God tells Peter that He decides what is clean and what is not
If God chooses, he can make something clean than was previously unclean
Jesus said in Mark 7:19 that it wasn’t ingesting foods that made you unclean
Uncleanness came from the heart
What God says to Peter applies to people as well as to food
In Ezekiel 36, God says he will create a new people willing to live out His commands
They are marked by a complete inward transformation (see Jer. 31:33 and Heb. 8:10)
This vision repeats twice more, showing its importance
By the end, Peter is still not completely understanding what God is saying

Read Acts 10:30-35

Cornelius is explaining his experience with the angel to Peter

8. vs. 30: Cornelius explains that he was praying, and specifically at 3 in the afternoon
Praying at 3:00 is called “the time of prayer” in Acts 3:1
This shows that Cornelius is a “Godly Gentile”, concerning with righteous practices
He sees a man in “shining clothes”, which certainly must be an angel
9. vs. 31: We aren’t told what Cornelius prayed, only that his prayer has been heard
Whatever the prayer was, God seems pleased with it and with answering it
Cornelius has shown himself to be righteous, having given gifts (money) to the poor
God is concerned with and for the poor, and wants His people to give for their need
(see Deut. 15:11)
10. vs. 32: The angel then tells Cornelius to send for Peter
He tells Cornelius where he is staying, a very specific name
If Peter is to come to Cornelius, then what he has to say must be of importance
11. vs. 33: Cornelius is a Roman centurion
He is used to giving orders and to obeying them
He sends for Peter immediately, and thanks Peter for coming when called
He is so sure Peter would come that he has gathered his family to hear Peter
Cornelius is sure that God has provided Peter with something to say to him
12. vs. 34: Peter, after hearing the story, know understands what God was saying in the vision
God wasn’t talking about foods as much as about people
God is calling the Gentiles to follow Him, just as He first called the Jews
God doesn’t show favoritism; all people are made in His image and called

This idea shows up frequently in the OT (Ex. 12:49, Num. 15:15-16, etc)

13. vs. 35: Peter concludes his realization with the idea that God accepts people from all nations
What He is looking for are people who fear Him and will do what is right
This pronouncement led to salvation for Cornelius and his family

Read Galatians 3:28-29

14. vs. 28: Paul writes this to the Galatian churches about 20 years after Peter met with Cornelius
This is in response to the churches wanting to circumcise Gentile believers
They thought this was necessary for them to receive salvation
Paul counters this argument by saying, in Christ, there is no distinction of persons
No Jew or Gentile, no slave or freeman, no male or female
All persons are the same to God if they have come to Christ for salvation
This covers the areas of ethnicity, social status, and gender
In OT times, being a Gentile, a slave, or a woman limited temple participation
Paul reminds them that faith in Christ isn't dependent on one's heritage
They may have begun life as a Jew or a Gentile, but now they are one in Christ
Paul says one's earthly standing (free or slave) doesn't affect one's status in Christ
Paul's last comparison is of gender; whether male or female, all have access to salvation
His point is clear: salvation through faith in Christ is equally accessible to all groups
15. vs. 29: The first-century Jews themselves as acceptable because they were in Abraham's line
Paul says that identification is true, but here he includes Gentiles in the same line
"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed"
The Jews saw their connection to Abraham biologically; Paul sees it spiritually
Abraham's blessing from God included the fact that it would be for all nations

Application: The story of Peter and Cornelius is the longest single story in Acts, which highlights its importance regarding accepting Gentiles into the new covenant. Jesus clearly spoke about the gospel being shared with all, but the first-century church struggled with overcoming divisions. There are other sources of division that can affect the church today: politics, worship styles, song choices, preaching styles. We are called to fix our eyes on Jesus, to remember that we are all one in Christ. That is the most important identity each current disciple can have. If we can remember that Christ alone is head of the church, and what he says reigns over all other thoughts, our divisions should disappear.

Prayer: Father God, forgive us for times that we have failed to see every brother or sister in Christ as an equal member of Your family. Help us to see no distinctions with other members of Your body as it relates to Your salvation given to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.