

Unit III. Visions of Praise

No Difference

DEVOTIONAL READING: Acts 15:6-18

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 10:34-47

PRINT PASSAGE: Acts 10:34-47

KEY VERSES

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. (Acts 10:34-35, KJV)

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Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right." (Acts 10:34-35, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Explore the gift of the Holy Spirit in your lives.
- Value the leadership of Peter in the early church and his relationship with Christ.
- Spread the good news that Christ is for all who want to know Him.

*Key Terms

Acceptable (verse 35)—Greek: *dektos* (dek-tos'): welcome; "accepted" (KJV); "accepts" (NIV).

Anointed (verse 38)—Greek: *chrió* (khree'-o): anointed; consecrated by anointing.

Healing (verse 38)—Greek: *iaomai* (ee-ah'-om-ahee): to heal.

Peace (verse 36)—Greek: *eiréné* (i-ray'-nay): one; peace; quietness; rest.

Truth (verse 34)—Greek: *alétheia* (al-ay'-thi-a): truth; divine truth revealed to humanity; "true" (NIV).

Witnesses (verse 39)—Greek: *martus* (mar'-toos): eyewitnesses or ear-witnesses.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

We learn from childhood what it means to be rejected. On the playground, we learn that some children did not want us on their team. In middle school, we learned that some kids did not want us in their clique or club because of how we dressed or wore our hair. And in high school and perhaps college, we



The Biblical Context

The word *Gentiles* refers to anyone who is not Jewish. Although it is derived from a Latin word, translators use the term in the place of the Hebrew word *goy*, meaning “nations,” and the Greek word *ethnos* as in Acts 10:35. Other words used of non-Jews in the New Testament are “Greeks” or *Hellenas* (see Romans 3:9), referring to those in the Greco-Roman world who were not Jewish, and “the uncircumcision” or *akrobystia* (see Ephesians 2:11), which referred to those who did not enter into a covenant relationship with Yahweh by keeping Jewish Law. Paul taught that Jesus had “broken down the dividing wall” between Jews and Gentiles by giving both groups “access in one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:11-22). The best way to unify contentious factions in any context is to reunite both to God. Before Gentiles were welcomed into the church, the barrier between Jews and Samaritans was broken down (see Acts 8:4-8). The Holy Spirit’s power draws people to the unity of the Godhead, despite the differences that would otherwise separate them. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are uniquely individual, they are distinctly divine. Likewise, the body of Christ is comprised of uniquely different members, yet it is one body united to God in Him.

learned that some people had no interest in befriending us because of our race or family reputation. Reasons for rejection range from random and trivial to highly specific and deeply heartfelt. In the recent U.S. presidential election, for example, some families who were deeply committed to one candidate or party platform or the other rejected and even condemned their own siblings, parents, or children because of differing political beliefs. It is just good that the God who uniquely created us in His own image does not relate to us as others do. God never randomly rejects us for reasons that are often beyond our control. This is the lesson for today. Despite our differences, we all belong to God and are saved by His love through Christ Jesus.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The Gospel for All (Acts 10:34-40)

KJV

34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:
35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is *accepted* with him.
36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching *peace* by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)
37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;
38 How God *anointed* Jesus of Nazareth with the

Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and *healing* all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

39 And we are *witnesses* of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;

NIV

34 Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how *true* it is that God does not show favoritism

35 “but *accepts* from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

36 “You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of *peace* through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

37 “You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—

38 “how God *anointed* Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and *healing* all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

39 “We are *witnesses* of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross,

40 “but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.”

Today’s lesson begins as Cornelius explained to Peter the vision that prompted his invitation and the reason for why all the members of his household were so eagerly gathered to hear Peter minister to them (verses 30-33, not in today’s lesson). In response to Cornelius and in recognition of his own vision (verses 9-16, not in today’s lesson), Peter confessed his belief that God is “no respecter of persons” (**verse 34**). Peter preached to Cornelius and to family members and friends that gathered at Cornelius’s home. By divine intervention, Peter was prompted to change his mind concerning the Gentiles. Before the dream, Peter, as many Jews, not only refused to preach the Good News of Jesus to the Gentiles but also shunned all social interactions with them. The disciples had frequently seen Jesus ministering to Gentiles without prejudice—the Roman centurion’s servant, the woman at the well, and the Syrophenician mother. Yet people, as many Christians, held on to prejudices and preconceived notions about others that could have hindered Peter from sharing the Gospel. Withholding the Gospel (or anything else) on the basis of race is neither God’s desire nor His design. God had to appear to Peter in a dream to convince Peter of His intention to make the Gospel available to everyone. God works His righteousness in all who fear and accept Him (**verse 35**).

Acts 10:36-43 is likely an abbreviated summation of a much longer sermon. Peter presented the message of salvation through Jesus Christ in a simple way so that Gentiles with no Christian background or knowledge of Christ could understand. He avoided making heavy Jewish historical and scriptural references and simply identified his message as the word of God sent to the children of Israel and proclaimed that the same Jesus who preached peace to all is Lord of all (**verse 36**). Peter explained that his message was not new; it was the same word that had been proclaimed throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee with the preaching of John the Baptist (**verse 37**). He continued by explaining that Jesus was anointed with the power of the Holy Ghost by God and went throughout the region, healing all who had been oppressed by the devil (**verse 38**). Peter declared himself and others present to be witnesses to Jesus’ mighty works in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, where Jews had killed Jesus by hanging Him on the tree—a reference to the Crucifixion at Calvary (**verse 39**). God raised the crucified Jesus from the dead on the third day during the celebration of Holy Festivals in Jerusalem (**verse 40**).

? WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Reflect on a time when you prejudged someone, only to realize later that you had judged the person wrongly. What lesson did you learn? Share.

The Gospel to All (Acts 10:41-47)

KJV

41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.
46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,
47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

NIV

41 “He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.
42 “He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.
43 “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”
44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.
45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles.
46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said,
47 “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.”

Peter confessed that Jesus' resurrection from death could be proven by records and testimony of an empty grave. After the Resurrection, Jesus did not make any large-scale public appearances as He had once done (**verse 41**). Those who saw and engaged the resurrected Christ were chosen by God and included those who ate and drank with Him during His earthly ministry (**verse 41**). Peter shared the command the Lord Jesus had given to His disciples—to preach the Gospel, testifying of their own experiences with God, and proclaiming Him as judge of the living and the dead (**verse 42**). The resurrected Jesus is the Messiah of the world, the same one spoken of by the prophets, and in whose name every believer will receive forgiveness from sin (**verse 43**). While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who had just heard Peter's sermon (**verse 44**). The text highlights the great astonishment of the Jewish Christians who were present to witness the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles (**verse 45**). They had heard Peter say that God was not a respecter of persons; He longs for everyone to be saved. Despite what they heard, however, they were still very amazed that God had poured out His Spirit upon these Gentiles, just as He had done for them. God had left no uncertainty in the matter, for everyone present could see and hear the new converts worshipping God and speaking in tongues, as they had done when the Spirit touched them on the Day of Pentecost (**verse 46**). In his surprise, Peter asked them who could deny water baptism to those who had experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (**verse 47**). There had been many excuses to exclude Gentiles from being baptized or from receiving the message of the Gospel. This divine affirmation could not be refuted; God had filled these new believers with His Spirit. Who could deny those whom God had accepted? This story is solid proof that the followers of Christ must present the Gospel to everyone.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Can you think of some creative ways to share the Gospel in your community?