

"The First Gentile Convert"

The New Testament reveals the story of the conversion of Cornelius, his family, and his friends. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." What saved Cornelius, and how did he obey?

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. Man has no greater need than a relationship with Jesus Christ and God our Father. To live with Him eternally we must have faith, must know His will, and we must give ourselves to Him in obedience. If you don't know the will of God, you won't be able to take up your cross and follow Him. Look closely at yourself and ask, "Am I following the Lord? Am I doing what He teaches?" Cornelius listened and obeyed. Will you? Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Acts 10 verses 1 and 2 says, "Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually." When you think of someone like Cornelius, who has such a fine character and fears God, you wonder why he should need to be converted. But, Cornelius, even though he was an honorable and devout man, who trained his household to believe and to pray to God as well. He, even though he was a generous man and a man of prayer. In spite of all this, he still needed to hear words by which he and his household might be saved (Acts 11 and verse 14).

Some today live like Cornelius; they're devout, prayerful, and generous. Yet if they don't know the Lord Jesus and have not heard the words that can save, they need to hear them just as badly as Cornelius did. Since we can't earn our salvation, we must hear the gospel truth and respond with obedient faith. God saves all men the same way, through the blood of Jesus Christ and in obedience to His will.

Now, we offer this study free on the first Gentile convert. If you'd like a printed copy of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org. The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Acts 10:23 to 28, and we'll explore the salvation of the first Gentile convert.

Our reading today comes from Acts chapter 10 verses 23 to 28. And here Peter and those six who were with him are entering into the house of Cornelius. Verse 23.

So he invited them in and gave them lodging. And on the next day he got up and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped *him*. But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am *just* a man." As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled. 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.

Oh, how thankful I am that we can be able to enter into the kingdom of God and be able to be a member of the body of Christ. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful that Your love and Your grace has opened up a door so that all people by faith and by obedience can come to be a part of Your family. Bless us now and help us to be good servants. In Jesus name, Amen.

Cornelius was a devout and prayerful man, but he was not yet a Christian; he was not yet cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus Christ. Acts 10:3 to 6 says, "About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!" And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. "Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter; he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea."

Well, why did the angel tell Cornelius to send for Peter in Joppa? Well we find Peter's answer to this question in Acts 11 verses 13 and 14, "And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, 'Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.'" Peter was going to teach Cornelius and his household words that would save them. Although Cornelius was a praying man, he still needed to hear words to be saved. Although Cornelius had spoken to an angel, he still needed words to save him.

Although this angel had spoken to him, the angel didn't tell him what to do to have his sins forgiven. Although the angel assured Cornelius that God had heard his prayers, he doesn't leave him rejoicing that he was already saved. No, the angel told him to send for a man who will tell him what he must do to be saved. Now, some who pray today need to know God would answer the same way He did with Cornelius. The answer to a prayer to be right with God comes in the form of hearing a message from God. Faith and obedience to the message preached will bring salvation.

God uses words to bring people to Christ and salvation. The apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 1:22 to 23, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." Now, we're born again when we obey the truth found in the imperishable seed, which is the living and enduring word of God. Salvation doesn't come from some "better felt than told experience" or from some miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit; it comes through obedience to the truth of the gospel.

Now, for this reason, the apostle Paul could say in Romans 1 and verse 16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Again, he said in 1 Corinthians 1:21, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." Friends, God doesn't miraculously operate on our hearts to give us faith. Romans 10 and verse 17 says that, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.(or the word of God)" Peter didn't come to Cornelius to give him a miraculous gift but came to give him words that would save him.

Peter had to be convinced about approaching the Gentiles with the gospel. You see up to this point, only Jews had become Christians. Before Cornelius' servants arrived, God used a trance at lunchtime on a rooftop to convince a hungry Peter to think differently. Acts 10 verses 11 to 16 says, "and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." Again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky." Peter was perplexed by the trance, and the men sent from Cornelius

arrived at the gate. The Holy Spirit spoke to Peter and told him to accompany these men without any misgivings. The men explained that Cornelius desired for Peter “to come to his house and hear a message from you.”

Well, two days later Peter along with six others entered Cornelius’ house, where many family and friends were gathered to hear his message. Now, by this time Peter recognized that “God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.” Peter said to those assembled, “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him (Acts 10 verses 34 to 35).

Peter then preached Jesus to Cornelius, his family, and his friends. Apparently, Cornelius knew some things about Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all and went about doing good and healing people miraculously, “for God was with Him.” He spoke of how the Jews “put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day” and made Him visible to the witnesses who were chosen. Peter revealed how the apostles were ordered to preach to the people about Jesus who was appointed by God as the Judge of the living and the dead. He noted in verse 43, “Of Him (that is of Jesus) all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

While Peter was speaking, the “Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message” (verse 44). All the circumcised Jewish believers were amazed that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles. Well, they heard the Gentiles speaking with tongues and exalting God. When Peter saw this, he said in verses 47 to 48, “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Now, this is not the first time Peter had spoken about being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. You’ll remember what he said on the day of Pentecost to those who were pierced to their hearts over the crucifixion of Jesus. Peter said in Acts 2:38 to 39, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. “For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” Cornelius would not receive the forgiveness of sins until he had obeyed the gospel message.

Now some say, “Phil, they received the Holy Spirit’s gift of tongues before they were baptized.” That’s true, but we must ask the question why and review the question when. In Acts chapter 11 Peter and the other six had to defend themselves before the apostles and the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem for going to the Gentiles with the gospel. And verse 4 says that Peter proceeded to “explain to them in orderly sequence” what happened. Now, “orderly sequence” means he told them what happened point by point. He spoke of his vision on the rooftop, learning that, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy” (Acts 11 verse 9). Verse 12 says that, “The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man’s house.” Peter then revealed that Cornelius’ vision of the angel telling him to send for Peter; “and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household” (verse 14).

Well, in Acts 11:15 to 17 Peter reported, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” Verse 18 says, “When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.”

You see, the miraculous speaking in tongues given by the Holy Spirit was not to save Cornelius and those with him but to convince the Jews that Gentiles were no longer to be considered unclean and unholy. From this time forward, they began preaching the gospel to Gentiles just as they did to their fellow Jews. Now, this unique reception of the gift of tongues did not mean the household of Cornelius was exempt from repentance or baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for them to receive the forgiveness of sins.

The purpose of miracles was not to save people but to confirm the words spoken by the apostles and evangelists of the time. Hebrews 2 verses 3 to 4 explains how the gospel matters and how miracles were used to confirm the word. It says, "How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." You see, miracles confirm the word, but God uses the gospel message to save those who are lost.

When Philip the evangelist preached in Samaria, the crowds gave attention to what was said by Philip, "as they heard and saw the signs (miracles) which he was performing" (Acts 8 and verse 6). He cast out unclean spirits and healed the lame and paralyzed. There was much rejoicing. And verse 12 says, "But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike." The Spirit didn't save the people through a direct operation. They believed the word, they were baptized, and then God saved them.

When an angel of the Lord and the Holy Spirit directed Philip to join the chariot of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8, the Spirit spoke to Philip; but Philip preached from the Scriptures to the Eunuch. There was no sinner's prayer, and there was no direct operation of the Spirit on the Eunuch. He heard Philip's preaching about Jesus and he wanted to be baptized in water (Acts 8 verses 35 to 39). The Eunuch realizing that he was saved when he was baptized went on his way rejoicing.

Although the apostle Paul, when he was known as Saul of Tarsus, heard the voice of Jesus in Acts chapter 9, the Lord Jesus only told him to "get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." Well, it's clear in the book of Acts that hearing the words of the gospel always preceded salvation. The speaker tells the sinner what he must do in order to be saved. And in Saul's case, you remember that Ananias told him in Acts 22 and verse 16, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." Baptism is clearly the time when God washes away sins. It wasn't a prayer, it wasn't a vision on the road, it was baptism and he was saved.

Let's pray together. Father we're thankful for Your love and we're thankful for the day. We're thankful Father that Your word clearly explains us what we need to do in order to be right with You. Help us to be good listeners and to be obedient to Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

When Cornelius heard what he needed to do, he didn't argue about it. He faithfully listened to Peter's message and obeyed. Acts 10:48 says, "And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." Some will tell you well, "Just say this sinner's prayer, and you will be saved"; but Peter, Philip, and Paul didn't propose that for salvation. Some think the Holy Spirit miraculously and irresistibly saves them by a direct operation; but it's clear from the book of Acts that people were saved by hearing the gospel and obeying it.

Hebrews 5:8 to 9 says, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation," Salvation is a gift from God to those who believe in Him and obey His teaching. We can't earn our salvation, but we can't receive it apart from obeying the Lord. Rather than depend on a short

sinner's prayer, like some suggest, why not follow Peter, Philip, and Paul, who were sent by God to teach people the true gospel and what to do to be saved. My friend, be like the noble Bereans and search the Scriptures. Find out how people were saved in the book of Acts. Don't be deceived.

When we hear and believe the gospel, repent of our sins, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and are baptized, then God saves us. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3 and verse 21, "Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." If you want to be saved and if you want to have a good conscience, then follow this teaching. And you'll never regret doing the right thing.

We hope that today's study about the first Gentile convert has stirred you to draw close to the Lord Jesus. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. You can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches that are in your area. You can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Why not subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry," on YouTube. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. And of course as we say, don't worry, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you get to heaven.

Do get your heart focused on God today by worshipping at church. There's probably a church of Christ in your area. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Well, we'll be back next week, Lord willing. Keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.