



WELCOMED BY THE GOSPEL

MAIN POINT

The Holy Spirit unites all believers.

ACTS 10:34-43 • GOD ACCEPTS ALL PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

34 Peter began to speak: “Now I truly understand that God doesn’t show favoritism, **35** but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. **36** He sent the message to the Israelites, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. **37** You know the events that took place throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John preached: **38** how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how he went about doing good and healing all who were under the tyranny of the devil, because God was with him. **39** We ourselves are witnesses of everything he did in both the Judean country and in Jerusalem, and yet they killed him by hanging him on a tree. **40** God raised up this man on the third day and caused him to be seen, **41** not by all the people, but by us whom God appointed as witnesses, 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 appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. **43** All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins.”

ACTS 10:44-48 • THE SPIRIT’S PRESENCE UNITES PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message. **45** The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. **46** For they heard them speaking in tongues and declaring the greatness of God. Then Peter responded, **47** “Can anyone withhold water and prevent these people from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” **48** He commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days.

ACTS 11:1-3,15-18 • THE CHURCH CELEBRATES WHEN PEOPLE BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

1 The apostles and the brothers and sisters who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. **2** When Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, **3** saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” . . . **15** “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came down on them, just as on us at the beginning. **16** I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ **17** If, then, God gave them the same gift that he also gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I possibly hinder God?” **18** When they heard this they became silent. And they glorified God, saying, “So then, God has given repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles.”

INTRO OPTION 1

COMMON GROUND

SUPPLIES LIST

NONE

Allow students to get into groups of three. Set the clock for two minutes. In this time, students must find three things they all have in common. (For example: all born in the same town, all have a dog, all hate onions.) Once the group comes up with three things, the members should sit down. When time is up, invite groups to stand and introduce themselves based on their list.

It's not as hard to come up with common ground as we think. Even within the church, we sometimes focus more on our differences. God challenged this same idea with the Jews and Gentiles, revealing that everyone could attain salvation through Christ.

INTRO OPTION 2

WELCOME

SUPPLIES LIST

NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing students time to share their answers and discuss.

WHAT IS THE PLACE YOU FEEL MOST WELCOMED? WHY?

WHO IS THE MOST WELCOMING PERSON YOU KNOW?

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU ARE UNWELCOME? HOW DOES THIS FEEL?

We've probably all experienced both ends of the spectrum: We've felt welcomed and accepted in to a community, and we've felt pushed out. As believers, we should be the most welcoming people. Why? Because we were once outsiders, and God welcomed us in!



1. GOD ACCEPTS ALL PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

READ ACTS 10:34-43

Peter's realization (v. 34) was crucial for what happened next. He didn't share a different gospel with the Gentiles. He shared the simple gospel: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for all sin. He was resurrected, and He commanded those who witnessed it to share the truth. Peter fully accepted that salvation was for everyone.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ACCEPTING PEOPLE AND EXCUSING SIN?

We have a misconception that acceptance means we condone someone's behavior. Acceptance means we see people as God sees them. It means we love them, despite our differences. It means we want them to know Jesus and be changed by Him. Accepting others doesn't mean we affirm their lifestyles. God accepts us, but the Holy Spirit also changes us and draws us away from our sin.

HOW DOES PETER SAY ALL PEOPLE CAN BE FORGIVEN? WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Peter clearly says all people are forgiven through belief in Christ (v. 43). We try to earn forgiveness through many means, but every other way will fail us. We simply can't be good enough. It's important for us to remember this as we walk with the Lord, but it's also important to remember this truth as we share it with unbelievers.

2. THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE UNITES PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

READ ACTS 10:44-48

God interrupted Peter's sermon. The Lord knew their hearts. He knew they believed in Christ at their hearing of the gospel. Traditions and rituals couldn't graft them into the family of God. Instead, the Holy Spirit instantly fell on them, uniting Jews and Gentiles through common faith in Jesus.

WHAT DID CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION DO TO THE BOUNDARY LINES PEOPLE HAD PUT IN PLACE BETWEEN GENTILES AND JEWS?

For centuries, a boundary existed between Jews and Gentiles; it was an "us" and "them" mentality. The Hebrew nation was God's chosen people, but Christ's sacrifice demolished this boundary line and leveled the playing field. Christ ushered in a new way—He alone is the way (John 14:6), and everyone has access to Him.



ACTS 10:34-43

10:34-35. “Peter saw that God does not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnic background, looking up to some and down on others. But God does discriminate between those whose behavior is acceptable and those whose attitude is not acceptable. Those who reverence God and practice what is right are acceptable to him (v. 35; Luke 8:21).”¹²

10:36. “The phrase ‘Lord of all’ would be well-known to a Roman as a pagan title for deity. Christians appropriately applied it to the Son of God. These things happened scarcely ten to fifteen years after the resurrection, so it is not at all unlikely that a sophisticated and religious man like Cornelius would have been quite familiar with the record of Jesus’s life.”¹³

ACTS 10:44-48

10:45-46. “Luke turns his gaze to the response of the Jews (circumcised believers). He notes the ones who had come with Peter were amazed. They understand Gentiles are now cleansed vessels that can be inhabited by the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit was a distinguishing mark of Israel. The believers immediately recognized the importance of this event. If the Spirit had been given to Gentiles, then they were part of the people of God.”¹⁴



BIG QUESTION

DID GOD SHOW FAVORITISM TO THE JEWS?

The Israelites were God’s chosen people, but we can misunderstand what this means. And maybe their misunderstanding led to prejudiced ideas as well. God chose the Hebrew people to bring about the birth of His Son to offer salvation to the world. But this didn’t mean He chose only them for salvation. In fact, many non-Israelites are even included in the genealogy of Jesus (like Tamar and Ruth)! In reading the Gospels, we see the attitude of favoritism and elitism was rampant among religious leaders. But salvation is for all people. God offered it first to the Jewish people, and then He used them to spread the gospel to the rest of the nations. Does God choose certain people to accomplish certain tasks? Yes. But all His children are His favorites!



SCRIPTURE READING

MAIN POINT

The Holy Spirit unites
all believers.

WHAT OTHER REQUIREMENTS BESIDES BELIEVING IN CHRIST DO WE SOMETIMES PLACE ON PEOPLE BEFORE WE ACCEPT THEM INTO OUR FAITH FAMILY?

We sometimes complicate the simple gospel. We add other requirements on top of what God requires, which is only to believe in and confess Christ as Lord. These Gentiles didn't abide by Jewish customs, such as kosher eating or circumcision. But Peter realized that anyone who believes in Christ is "clean." We tread on dangerous ground when we add to the gospel. If we're requiring people to adhere to our own ideas and convictions before we welcome them into God's family, we are overstepping our place and playing the role of God. It is God who welcomes us all, and it's the Holy Spirit who continues to sanctify believers and convict them.

3. THE CHURCH CELEBRATES WHEN PEOPLE BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

READ ACTS 11:1-3,15-18

Some of the Jews who heard Peter's report responded with an attitude many of us also respond with: criticism. They were more concerned with the Gentiles converting to their practices than they were with the Gentiles' need for salvation. It's understandable—the Jews had lived this way for centuries, keeping strict traditions to obey God. But after hearing Peter's explanation, they couldn't deny that salvation was for all people through Jesus, and they were overjoyed!

WHAT ATTITUDE DO YOU SEE IN VERSES 2-3? HOW DOES THIS ATTITUDE SHOW UP IN THE CHURCH TODAY?

We see criticism in these verses, but we also see arrogance and condescension. It's as if they asked Peter, "You seriously hung out with those people?" This attitude can still infiltrate our hearts today. We draw boundaries around who we're willing to spend time with or share the gospel with, and we don't welcome them into the church as willingly as we do others.

WHAT SOMETIMES KEEPS US FROM CELEBRATING WHEN SOMEONE ACCEPTS CHRIST?

Jealousy and pride often keep us from celebrating when others succeed, but this can happen when others accept Christ too. We become jealous of the attention they receive within the group. We allow pride to set in because maybe we know how they lived before knowing Christ, and we have a hard time believing they'll change. We adopt an elitist attitude much like the Sadducees and Pharisees. But Christ says even one sinner coming to Him is cause for celebration (Luke 15:10).



10:45-46. “Peter and his visitors witnessed what some have called ‘the Pentecost of the Gentile world.’ Luke tells us they were astonished (literally, ‘beside themselves’) at the similarity between this and the Pentecost experience— instantaneous, visible, audible, it apparently affected everyone in Cornelius’s household. Notice we find no laying on of hands even though an authorized apostle is present. Let’s say it again— Peter did not control any of this, from the sheet in Joppa to the tongues in Caesarea. God works precisely as he chooses.”¹⁵

ACTS 11:1-3,15-18

11:1-2. “The strongest reservations seem to have been entertained by a group of especially conservative Jewish Christians. . . . Evidently they represented a strongly Jewish perspective and felt that any Gentile who became a Christian would have to do so by converting to Judaism and undergoing full Jewish proselyte procedure, which included circumcision. Hence they were known as the circumcision group, since they would require it of all Gentile converts. They may well have been the same group as those believers mentioned in 15:5 who belonged to the Pharisees and required Gentiles to be circumcised and to live by the Mosaic law. Their perspective is understandable, given that at this point Christianity was still seen as a movement within Judaism.”¹⁶

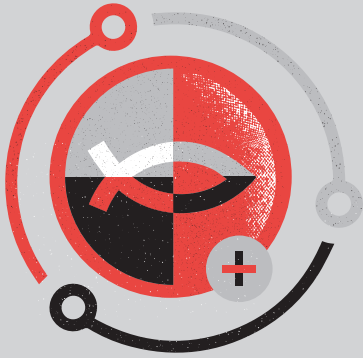
11:17. “Peter surmised that since God was doing all of this and he has chosen to deal with Gentiles the same way he treated us Jews, who was I to think that I could oppose God. The argument is clear: opposition to Gentile baptism is opposition to God.”¹⁷



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE

REPENTANCE

Repentance is a response to God’s gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for our sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from our sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God’s work of regeneration; in other words, it’s the human side of our conversion.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Peter learned that God does not show favoritism but calls His people to proclaim the message of Jesus's death and resurrection to all people, to celebrate His work in their lives, and to welcome believers into His family, regardless of their ethnicity.



HEAD



HEART



HANDS

DO YOU HAVE A SUPERIOR MENTALITY TOWARD OTHER CULTURES OR ETHNICITIES THAT YOU NEED TO REPENT OF? EXPLAIN.

It's no secret that the disciples likely had strong opinions about Gentiles. They were Jewish men and products of a Jewish culture. But God continued to work old ideas out of them, as we see in Peter. This is part of our sanctification as well. The Lord continues to reveal areas of our lives (and our minds) that need cleaning up. God makes us more like Him as we follow Him, and this includes our thoughts toward others. There are no divisions in God's family. Racism and elitism are unacceptable when we consider the cross. We're all sinners, accepted into one family through Christ.

FAITH IN CHRIST IS THE ONLY WAY TO EXPERIENCE FORGIVENESS. HOW HAVE YOU ADDED TO THE GOSPEL AND TRIED TO EARN FORGIVENESS BY OTHER MEANS?

We have a skewed view of forgiveness because of our relationships with people. When we wrong others, we often feel like we have to work for their forgiveness. They may even place stipulations on our relationship, or they make us pay for what we've done. We sometimes approach our relationship with God in this way too. We seek to do good things in order for Him to forgive us. We take part in behavior modification. But this isn't how Scripture says we gain forgiveness with God. He freely forgives us when we believe in Jesus, and the overflow of this is a changed life and good works.

PETER'S OBEDIENCE LED TO THE SALVATION OF CORNELIUS AND EVERYONE PRESENT IN HIS HOME. WHERE DO YOU NEED TO BE OBEDIENT?

Peter's obedience was crucial. It led to a revolutionary shift in the church. Now, even pagan Gentiles, or outsiders, could believe in Christ and be saved. Peter didn't know why God was leading him to meet with Cornelius. Sometimes we can't see why God asks us to do certain tasks, but our obedience could play a part in a much bigger story. What a privilege for God to ask us to be His instruments in the world!