

The Wall of Separation



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Acts 10, KJV

Verses 1-6

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 always.

He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

And now send men to Joppa, and call for [one] Simon, whose surname is Peter:

He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

Verses 9-16

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:

And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,

And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

In Acts 10:1-6; 9-16; 28, 29, God gave Cornelius instructions to send for Peter.

The first important realization for us to understand is that Peter was a Jew. As a Jew he was forbidden by God's law to associate with a Gentile man such as Cornelius. Jews would not keep company with anyone who was not of their religion, and they carried it to the point that even to *touch* a Gentile or someone of another faith was considered "pollution" and coming into contact with "the unclean."

So we must realize right away that there are three strikes against Cornelius: 1) he was uncircumcised, 2) he was a Gentile and 3) he was a Roman centurion, the symbol of the "abomination of desolation" to the Jews.

It doesn't sound like Peter and Cornelius are off to a good start, does it?

Now let's look at Peter's vision. He saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air. The Scripture says he saw "every species of quadrupeds, wild and domestic." Notice that all the animals in the sheet, God had created, clean and unclean, animals over whom man was given dominion in the Garden of Eden. All of these were let down from heaven in a great sheet knit at the four corners.

And the voice said, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." ... as if to say, "Here is a feast laid before you ... eat whichever one you like." After all, Peter was very hungry!

Please note that *there were no fish* mentioned in this vision! Peter was a fisherman! No doubt he ate a steady diet of fish. To eat fish was not forbidden by the law – but there were no fish in the sheet.

Now maybe this doesn't mean anything at all ... but my personal opinion is that we can learn from what *isn't* there, as well as what is. What *wasn't* in the sheet is the food that Peter enjoyed probably almost every day. Let's call that "the old concept". The things he was used to. The understanding he already possessed. Why, as an experienced fisherman, Peter knew everything about fish!

What IS in the sheet is an entirely "new concept" that was about to change much more than Peter's understanding.

Now let's learn what some of these words mean in the original Greek. "Common" means something unclean, defiled, unholy or profane. Something "common" meant it was forbidden by Jewish law. "Unclean" means something not cleansed. In a ceremonial sense, that which must be abstained from, according to Levitical law. In a moral sense, it means unclean in thought and life.

The reason the Old Testament law made a distinction between which meats were fit to eat and which were not was to show the difference between “the clean” and “the common, or unclean.”

The law deliberately made a difference between Jew and Gentile and this made it very difficult for Jews to eat with Gentiles because they would have set before them those things that they were not allowed to eat.

Poor Peter! His mind must have been reeling at this new concept. Simply put, this vision means that God is plainly telling him that this prohibition between Jew and Gentile is lifted. God is saying that these kinds of meats are no longer “unclean” and further, now the Jews can eat with the Gentiles! God was giving allowance ... permission, if you will, to be free and familiar with the Gentiles. God is saying here very plainly to Peter, “What I have cleansed you may no longer judge to be unclean or defiled.” And Peter got the message (Acts 10:28).

It’s easy for us to look at this with hindsight and say that this principle should have been apparent to the disciples before this time. Jesus, in many different ways, times and places made it very clear that God’s love extends to everyone, regardless of social standing, nationality or public opinion. He spoke to the Samaritan woman. He went to supper with the hated tax collector. He rubbed shoulders and ate with the publicans and sinners, freely expressing camaraderie and acceptance even to those who had no testimony in the law of Moses.

But somehow, it took a direct revelation from God even to the apostles to show that Gentiles were now to be accepted into fellowship. It was a long and deeply rooted belief among the Jews that God would never extend His favor to the Gentiles ... but to Peter, it’s all turned upside down now. God is telling Him that salvation is no longer limited to the Jews.

The vision to Peter has to do with the understanding that he had at the time. It’s a vision that we may not comprehend in its depth without historical study because as Gentiles we have not been raised with Jewish history.

But the eternal truth of the voice of God applies to us all. Let’s learn of the history to get to the understanding of eternal, perfectly balanced truth.

“What God hath cleansed, call not thou uncommon or unclean.”

Let’s look at some of the differences between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews had been taught all their lives about the things that made them dis-

Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

And the voice [spake] unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, [that] call not thou common.

This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

Verses 28-29

And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Therefore came I [unto you] without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?

inctive. Everything about them identified them as different, or peculiar. Their clothes. Their food. Their names. Their worship. Everything about their manner of life. They could not come into contact, even, with the Gentiles. To *touch* a Gentile would be to pollute a Jew. Everybody else was “unclean”. Certain foods were unclean. You couldn’t wear wool and linen together. Sacrifices had to be done a certain way; that was the law of God. Jews only spoke to Gentiles when it couldn’t be avoided, such as in matters of trade. And when a Jew had contact with a Gentile, that Jew became unclean (Acts 10:28) and so unable to take part in any social gatherings or any sort of worship. It was unheard of for a Gentile woman to approach any Jewish man.

And to reinforce that belief system, the Jews had a “Wall of Separation.”

In the Jewish temple of Jesus’ day, there was a wall that separated the outermost court (called the Court of the Gentiles) from the inner court where only Jews were permitted. That dividing wall had an inscription on it that said that any Gentile who passed beyond the wall of separation would be put to death.

To where even with the introduction of Christianity, the people were so steeped in the customs and manner of Judaism that they expected it to continue and to incorporate the rites of Judaism into the worship service of Christianity. Gentiles, in order to gain acceptance into Christianity were required to be circumcised; that was the great debate of the day. Paul and Peter address it other places.

But right in the middle of all of this is introduced a principle of divine truth; Peter stood up, rocking conventional wisdom and understanding, and said, “God hath shewed me that I [a Jew] should not call any man common or unclean.”

What a radical thought for the day! The whole Jewish nation was based on that precept and had been for centuries!

And now Peter is telling them that God is saying here that Christianity is NOT based upon the Old Testament order of things. The “kingdom within” that Christ taught is much better than the old kingdom of the law. This new concept is not based upon all the things that make us “different;” it’s not to be based upon the outward ritual observances of the spiritual Jew that reaffirms his identity to himself and to the world; no, no, it goes back, now, to the creation and the Creator when everything that He created was “good.”

This principle of divine truth carries with it the weight of divine authority and the definition of an almighty, majestic God. God’s got His hand in this. It hearkens back to the beginning of time and the very definition of creation and has to do with the basic definition of God.

And if it is indeed a divine principle of truth, here is how reverently it must be handled: Don’t excuse it. Don’t change it. Don’t define it according to tradition or custom. It’s something God has settled in the heavens now as part of the definition of truth. That means that it applies to us all. Every nation and every generation. Every educational level. Both genders.

NO group of believers has the right any more to be “spiritual Jews” in that sense. All the things that separated the Jews from the Gentiles – the laws, the rituals, the identifying characteristics, spiritual pride of every sort, feelings of superiority and exclusivity, those things that have defined for you the definition of “unclean” or “common,” something that before, simply because of an outward observance, looked like something “not cleansed” – the very root of those things is completely eradicated with the voice of God instituting this “new concept.”

And when we truly understand this concept, and plant in our hearts *and our minds* the seed of this divine truth, the very manifestation of the divine love of God, the willingness to step down from the lofty self-exalted position of spiritual Judaism, that is when we will become effective in preaching the gospel to the world.

And if we look at the following verses, we'll read the very first message preached to the Gentiles by Peter – and that message was Jesus Christ. And the result of that message was the Holy Ghost descending on them all: both Jew and Gentile. AND THEY ACCEPTED THE WITNESS OF GOD IN THAT REGARD.

And from there the gospel spread throughout the land ... to the extent that the early morning Church grew in numbers and prosperity.

I see in the world today, among certain religions, a “spiritual Judaism” that has forgotten this very important principle of truth. There are those religions today that build upon the very Old Testament principles that focus on and identify the outward differences between Jew and Gentile. The fact of the matter, the very divine principle of truth is, “God is no respecter of persons.” What that means, according to the Greek is ... “God is not one who discriminates.”

Acts 10:35 tells us, “*But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*” This is eternal truth. It's God's definition of His children. Aren't you glad that this definition includes all those who work righteousness?

Now let's learn the practical application of this lesson. I have learned that in order to take the gospel effectively to those have been formerly considered “unclean” we need to be changed from the old ways to understand this basic truth.

Ephesians 2:14 says, speaking of the former enmity between Jews and Gentiles: “*For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.*”

Let's talk about that middle wall of separation, for it is the foundation and beginning of creeds and division and sectism. Anytime you see a creed, written or unwritten, being put in place, you will find an exclusivity and a separation that isn't in accordance with New Testament teaching.

Let's sidetrack here for just a minute: spiritual division is not defined as mere differences of opinion. Paul tells us plainly that there are differences of administration; obviously, then, this is not the definition of division. Division isn't when two people disagree on a method of spreading the gospel; the book of Acts makes it very clear that Paul and Peter differed on method, but neither one was accused of division.

To be very plain, division is a departure from the truth of God's Word. Division is the very root of creeds and sects and it's built upon requiring obedience to commandments not spelled out in the New Testament. The middle wall of separation is built again when tests of fellowship or levels of spirituality are gauged by the adherence to commandments admittedly not scriptural. It's when the definitions of “common” or “unclean” are applied incorrectly. Gentiles can do it to Jews these days and churches can do it to other churches.

I love the verses found in Colossians 2:20-22, where it says, “*Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not: Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?*”

And Colossians 3:9-17 gives us the answer to these prejudices: “*Lie not to one another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved,*

bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

Here’s what we don’t get to do. We don’t have the right to rebuild the wall. Bigotry in any form, spiritual or literal, is contrary to this principle of godly truth. Racial prejudice is taken care of with this scripture. Peter says with this vision that a wrongly defined spiritual exclusivity is so very wrong.

Let it be said that I believe in holiness. I believe the Bible teaches it and I believe that those who name the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But I also believe that there exists today a middle wall of partition of prejudice that however well intentioned, hinders the expansion of the kingdom – not because there is no zeal, but that it is not according to knowledge, as Paul says in Romans 10.

Galatians 3:28 furthers our understanding of this concept and says, *“There is neither Jew, nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

Look at the battle of the sexes in religion. You can see it so clearly sometimes between males and females in certain religions. The answer they give is: “God made a difference,” when the fact of the matter is that a proper application of scripture does away with the traditional thinking of the Old Testament. By all means, balance it with a clear and researched understanding of scripture and history and tradition ... but accept the truth of these scriptures in your balancing. In Christ Jesus, there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female. Just as free as the Greek is to partake in the gospel of Jesus, so free is the slave and the woman. Not just with salvation. Not self righteously or chauvenistically kept “in their place” — but in Christ Jesus!

It’s part of the definition of truth that God is no respecter of persons. And in our stretching of the mind with this new concept, isn’t it interesting that the word used here is *“persons?”* So many times the New Testament uses the word “man” – but here it says “persons.” And the definition of the phrase in the Greek means, “God is not one who discriminates.” He doesn’t discriminate between Jew and Gentile. He doesn’t discriminate between male and female. He doesn’t discriminate between races. He doesn’t discriminate between rich and poor.

It was a divine revelation, folks. Jesus showed it in action with His ministry time and again; but it still took a divine revelation to His apostles. And from the understanding of that principle came the expansion of the kingdom within. THIS is one of the differences between the old law and the dispensation of grace.

Every time this New Testament principle is ignored, Old Testament legalism is the result. The middle wall of partition is rebuilt in a spiritual sense every time spiritual prejudice is manifested. Legalism and adherence to the “touch not, taste not, handle not,” Old Testament law will become evident. Definitions of spirituality will be based on those who adhere to the rules ... and “salvation is of the Jews” will become the attitude of those who have placed themselves in the “inner court.”

The good news is that God’s definition of truth will never change. “He is no respecter of persons,” and the acceptance of that divine truth in my heart shows me that I, too, “should not call any man common or unclean.”

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