

While Simon was staying in Caesarea he found himself unexpectedly engaged in a momentous turn of events in the history of the new Church of God. The stoning of Stephen seemed to have marked a major turning point in God's working with Israel. They had persistently and consistently rejected His overtures through the Jewish converts among them, now numbering thousands and nationwide in extent.

They had killed Stephen with impunity (why didn't the Romans object?) and twice had attempted to kill Saul who had been suddenly converted by the Lord he was persecuting. Philip was actively evangelizing the regions surrounding Jerusalem and the apostles had begun to move outward as they had been commissioned by the Lord after His resurrection. Peter had just been used to demonstrate the resurrection power of the risen ascended Lord, raising a faithful sister in the Lord from the dead. While not repeated in the ensuing years and centuries it marked the validity and power behind the faith spreading across the land. Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, native Jews then foreign Jews then Samaritans, a black Gentile proselyte and Jews in the outlying coastal Palestinian cities had been added. Now some years later in another coastal city, Caesarea, the rest of the world was about to be added as well. Gentiles, those peoples long despised and hated by the Jews, were about to be converted, filled with the Holy Spirit and baptized as believers and disciples of Jesus Christ. The enormity of this event is lost on most of us Gentile believers almost 19 centuries later. It was mind boggling to Peter to say the least. Note the gentle firmness of the Lord in preparing him for it and then directing and coaching him along the way. When confronted with the sight of the Holy Spirit falling upon a group of Romans who had just believed the gospel he was able to recognize it for what it, and accept it. Sweeping aside deeply ingrained religious values and traditions he enthusiastically welcomed the new believers and commanded they be baptized. WOW!!!! What grace God has instilled in the hearts of the believers by the Holy Spirit in them. Yes, in us too!

The Holy Spirit moved these Roman Gentiles to speak in tongues of other nations. Acts documents a public sign of one's filling of the Holy Spirit in successive classes of believers as the circle of grace widened. This does not mean that everyone who is saved must speak in tongues. Indeed there are many instances of souls receiving Christ in Acts that the speaking in tongues is not mentioned, including the three thousand saved on the day of Pentecost. However **every believer immediately receives the Holy Spirit upon believing.**

Ephesians 1:13 *In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His*

glory.

Was Cornelius a child of God before he called Peter? The text points us that way. He was a typical Gentile who had sought God by faith and been blessed. He then had borne out his faith by consistent fear of God and his righteous life. But he didn't know **Jesus** as Savior yet.

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.

Announcing this momentous fundamental truth, Peter ushers the Gentile believers into the Kingdom of Heaven. He had been given the keys and authority to bind and to loose by the Lord Himself, Matthew 16:19. Here he exercised it.

Though well regarded by the Jews he was policing, Cornelius had not converted to Judaism and become a proselyte as had the Ethiopian. But the Lord Himself appeared to him in angelic form, not to save him but to bring him to a chosen human source of further light. Cornelius did not have the blinding experience Saul had. Nor did he need it. He was a believer already, not an insolent, religious persecutor. Incidentally here we learn also that Gentiles no longer can go to God through the Jews to be saved. The former keepers of the truth have forfeited the blessing of what was entrusted them.

Romans 3:1 *What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? 2 Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.*

Romans 9:30 *What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law.*

The truth that is in Jesus is to be found through the testimony of born again saints whether Jew or Gentile by nationality. The Lord simply announced to Cornelius "*thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.*" Cornelius was addressed as a true saint of God just as were Job or Rahab and other non Jewish believers. He was ready for more light. By God's grace, more light was available. The simplicity and brevity of Peter's statement revealing the light is remarkable. It seems almost like a simple review of historical events. Events of which Cornelius was already familiar. Apparently he considered them to be Jewish events not applying to him, a Gentile. Perhaps he felt he wasn't worthy. And indeed until Peter was sent to him it wasn't for him. He had rightly assumed the preaching excluded Gentiles like him. Yet he had persisted in following the light he had been given and God honors that in every age. Peter declared a basic truth.

Acts 10:35 *"But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.*

This sounds a little like salvation by works, but note, the works follow the faith, as they should, James 2:18-22.

Acts 10:35 "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. 36 "The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ--He is Lord of all-- 37 "that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by 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 killed by hanging on a tree. 40 "Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, 41 "not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 "And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. 43 "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

Some basic truths of the doctrine of Christ are not mentioned in Peter's brief address. For instance, that Jesus is the Son of God incarnate. That He was a man of God sent from God is declared. That He died for our sins, is implied by verses 40 and 43. That He is Lord is contained in verse 37 and confirmed in verse 42. Not much knowledge is necessary for salvation. That is included with the spiritual growth that follows, as seen in Peter's last recorded written words,

2Peter 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever..

But the Holy Spirit did not wait for even an audible assent to the name of Jesus as Savior. They evidently believed in their hearts

Romans 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. 10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

They believed in their hearts, and being filled with the Spirit, at Peter's direction, they were baptized in **the name of the Lord** thereby confessing Jesus as Lord.

1Corinthians 12:3 Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

In this unique situation they were baptized under Peter's direction. (Note that others did the baptizing here, not Peter. An "official" was not needed)

Three times baptism in the name of the Lord occurs in Acts.

The new believers in Samaria,

Acts 8:16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

The new Gentile believers in Caesarea,

Acts 10:48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

The disciples of John in Ephesus,

Acts 19:5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

But didn't they use the "formula given them by the Lord?

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Which should we be using today when we have the blessed occasion of baptizing a new convert? Both?

Peter remained in Caesarea with the new converts teaching and encouraging them. Great Apostle to the Gentiles had been converted and was in God's training program preparing to go forth unto the Gentiles with the Glad Tidings, Galatians 1 & 2. He would also bring the unheard of truth of the Church, including Jews and Gentiles into one Body, one new man. This was given to Him solely by the Lord to reveal to all believers. He doesn't reappear until late chapter 12.

But meanwhile Peter is soon called to account by the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem, because of his consorting with the Gentiles. The transition away from Jewish preeminence and Old Testament tradition would neither be rapid or smooth. But the Lord is gracious. We are to be also.

By Ronald Canner, September 9, 2009