

INCLUDING

Acts 10:34-48

There are a lot of things we think we know to be true that are simply false. A lot of such “beliefs” are simply superstitions that have been passed on from prior generations and some of those ideas likely came from pagan religious practices which have been around for centuries. A clue that this might be the origin of a particular idea is found in the description of the consequences of taking such actions associated with the “beliefs.” Usually, there is either “good luck” or “bad luck” involved. We could easily compile a list of such ideas that would involve such things as black cats, ladders, spilled salt, stepping on a crack, and breaking mirrors.

In addition to believing such false things to have some elements of truth, we have beliefs about other nations, other cultures, other races, and any number of “other” situations that are mixtures of truth and fiction. We have a tendency to think that certain things just don’t fit together because of such beliefs. Such ideas that have no basis in truth can have significant influence on the way we act and treat other people. Every culture has such preconceived ideas.

The church has struggled with misunderstandings of what is acceptable to God and how to distinguish between rituals and realities as well as the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. Part of the problem that the Jews had in accepting Jesus during His earthly ministry was related to their entrenched ideas of the law, the commandments, and the various practices that had been adopted during the previous centuries. Many of these beliefs of devout Jews would continue to be a problem by being in conflict with the grand mission of the church.

Ten years after Pentecost, the church was still made up of Jews, proselytized Gentiles who were considered to be Jews, and Samaritans who were partial Jews. Perhaps, the only exception was the Ethiopian official and he might have been proselytized some time before he became a believer. It doesn’t take much thought to come up with a logical reason that Gentiles were not part of the church. They were not readily accepted by church members of that time. The strong traditional Jewish religious background had been a big hindrance to reaching out to Gentiles. This problem persisted even after churches had been planted in places like Asia Minor and parts of Europe. There were Judaizers who insisted that Gentiles needed to be practitioners of Judaism before they could be Christians.

To some extent, in the more recent history of the church and the modern evangelical movements starting in the 1800s, there was an effort to “westernize” African, Chinese, American Natives, and other groups before or immediately after introducing them to the Gospel. This practice is now recognized as being not only unnecessary but a hindrance to people accepting the gospel message.

As humans, we typically have a lot of inertia in making changes that require significantly new insight that goes beyond the way we have been accustomed to thinking. Such significant change in our thinking is commonly called a paradigm shift. Just think of the significant changes that we find in the Biblical record regarding our understanding of God and how we are to interact with Him. In most cases that we can recall, God had to intervene to get us out of our entrenched understanding/behavior so that we would be able to make progress in really understanding God’s Plan of Salvation. Starting with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the intervention in Cain’s life after he killed his brother, the interaction with Noah, the confusion of languages at Babel, the call of Abram, God’s intervention in Sodom and Gomorrah, the birth of Isaac, the intervention in the sacrifice of Isaac, God’s call of Moses, the plagues in Egypt, the Passover, the parting of the Sea, the giving of the Law, the conquest of Canaan, the choice of

David rather than Saul, the exile in Babylon, the return to the Promised Land, the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, life and ministry of Jesus, the death and resurrection of Jesus, Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, Philip's experience on the road to Gaza, and Saul's conversion – all these had unmistakable, overt divine intervention. We, as humans, have difficulty in getting out of the well-defined paths that we have been in for the past decades or more.

We have noted that God used gradual progression as the church spread the Gospel message, but ten years before the message was taken to the Gentiles shows a lot of patience. We see evidence that God was moving to prepare people to be in positions to take the gospel to the Gentiles in what He had done through Philip and Saul. After Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian official, he moved to Caesarea. Saul was commissioned to be Christ's ambassador to the Gentiles. The third thing that had happened to get things ready was that God had intervened directly with a devout Gentile named Cornelius who lived in Caesarea. We are familiar with a series of Godly interventions in the life of Simon Peter that were preparation steps needed that would help with this next phase in carrying out the Great Commission in which Peter went to the home of Cornelius.

We know the story of how the three men from Cornelius arrived at the house where Peter was at the exact time that Peter came out of the trance. After hearing their story, Peter and six others accompanied the three to the home of Cornelius in Caesarea.

Cornelius had gathered all his relatives and close friends in anticipation of what God would do when Peter arrived. After the initial meeting and clarification that Peter was not some sort of god, Peter saw the connection between the trance experience and this meeting. Cornelius again related what God had told him through an angel.

Offered to All – 10:34-36

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), Acts 10:34–36 (ESV)

In Deuteronomy 1:17, 10:17, and 16:19 Moses stated that God does not show partiality. There are numerous other passages in the Old Testament that mentions the judgments of God against wicked for anyone who sins and rebels against God which applied to the people of Israel as well as to the pagan nations. Simon Peter had just experienced a series of visions and messages from God that had preceded this meeting with Cornelius. These events allowed him to more fully understand the implication of the Old Testament passages regarding showing favoritism and how those truths should be applied in his life at that time. It was an "aha" moment for him and he shared that with those who had gathered in the home of Cornelius to hear the gospel message.

Notice the words Peter used. "Every" and "anyone" speaks of the inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God (no partiality). However, while the invitation Jesus extended (come unto Me) includes all who will choose to come (regardless of their status or condition in the world), the ways of the world are excluded and must be abandoned and left behind as these are incompatible with life in the Kingdom associated with the New Covenant. The way of the world is to reject God, but we find that Cornelius "feared" or had appropriate reverence for God. The way of the world is to decide for oneself what is good and what is evil, but we see that Cornelius did what was truly right or that which aligned with Godly character.

Evidence abounds for all who will see that "God is." This Roman soldier had faith in God and recognized that God is generous (full of grace). We realize that the outcome of our

lives is influenced by that in which we truly believe. Cornelius acted on the limited faith he had by helping people in need. He also saw the need for regular communication with God.

God had a significant blessing for Cornelius and his family and He sent an angel to announce it. Cornelius had given to the poor and God is concerned about the poor. Those who are close to God will recognize His directions and commands and act upon what He says. The need to be vigilant and attentive to what God wants us to do is ever present. We may not experience a vision of an angel visiting us with a message such as Cornelius did. However, God does have tasks he wants us to do and these are communicated to us in many ways. You may hear of a need in your neighborhood or someone may ask you to get involved in a particular ministry. Such information may be God directing you to a particular work of ministry.

God's timing is truly amazing. God had already prepared the heart of the one who needed salvation and now He was preparing the heart of one who had already been saved. Preparation was needed for acceptance of such a radical departure from what had happened during the past decade. This step needed to involve Peter who was viewed to be in a leadership role in the church. God sent an angel to instruct Cornelius and, in true military fashion, Cornelius immediately obeyed.

The time schedule was in place and the right person chosen for the mission. The next step was to get Peter prepared for what God was going to do. Peter had lived as an orthodox Jew all of his life. The Law of Moses was a wall between the Jews and the Gentiles, and this wall had been removed at the cross. Even though the veil in the temple had been torn from top to bottom and the New Testament had been instituted at the death of Christ, Judaism was still in operation in the minds of many. The Gentiles were considered aliens and strangers as far as the Jewish covenants and promises were concerned. But now, all of that would change, and God would declare that, as far as the Jew and the Gentile were concerned, "There is no difference" either in condemnation (Rom. 3:22–23) or in salvation (Rom. 10:12–13).

Jesus had already told the disciples to take the gospel to ends of the earth. All mankind was to hear the message. We tend to heed what we want to hear and ignore the rest. Peter had a paradigm of who make up the people of God and practically everyone in that group was Jewish. Everyone else was deemed unclean. God sees the end results and He knows that all (Jews and Gentiles) are unclean until they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Through Faith – 10:37-43

³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He 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 that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Acts 10:37–43 (ESV)

Peter then began to relate the message of the gospel using only historical and verifiable information. There was nothing in what Peter said regarding what we might label as significant spiritual truths. He did not mention the virgin birth, nothing was stated about Jesus' divinity (the Son of God), and no mention was made the He was the incarnation of God.

Some of the truths that were not directly stated could be implied by what Peter stated about Jesus being appointed by God to judge the living and the dead and by reference to the prophecies found in the Old Testament regarding forgiveness of sins because, by His death, He

was the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world to which all the ritual practices of the Israelites had been pointing for centuries. Before he was through speaking, something significant happened.

Acceptance Found – 10:44-48

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷ “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days. Acts 10:44–48 (ESV)

Peter had learned much since the Day of Pentecost and could relate the happenings of recent times to prophecies of the Old Testament. He was prepared to present convincing proof from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah. As it turned out, God doesn’t need much preaching to bring people to a point of conviction and conversion.

Though we may know the truth that God is not a respecter of persons, we may still be amazed when He blesses others in the same way He blesses us. The impact of the presence of God on a person’s life should be such that other believers can know that God is with them.

If “tongues” manifested on the Day of Pentecost were simply languages of the day for the benefit of the visitors in Jerusalem, then why were they manifested in the household of Cornelius? The simple answer is that this phenomenon was believed to be a sign that these Gentile people should be accepted into the body of Christ. Evidently such a strong sign was needed to overcome the strongly held beliefs of the Jewish church members regarding God’s salvation for non-Jews.

Since there was no difference in the way God confirmed faith in Christ, whether to the Jew or Gentile, that difference was no longer of any consequence. They were cleansed by faith in Jesus’ name. Baptism identified this group of Gentiles with the community of the redeemed. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues served to authenticate that these Gentiles had truly believed and were to be regarded no differently than Jewish believers.

There are a lot of religious beliefs that people have today that come from common sayings that are accepted and maybe even generally practiced but have no real scriptural basis. We need to be on guard to not let such preconceived ideas keep us from seeing the truth of the word of God and sharing it with others.