



The Gentile Breakthrough (Acts 10:34-11:18)

A. The First Gospel Preached to the Gentiles

1. Here we are looking at Peter's first gospel message to the Gentiles, the 'non-Jews'. He made two statements that are deeply offensive to the Jews and their worldview. (a) *'God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.'* (10:28) (b) *'God has no favourites.'* (10:34).

The Jewish ceremonial law divided everything into 3 categories – Holy; Common (Clean); Unclean. According to the law what is holy must never come in contact with what is common, and what is common with what is unclean. To avoid defilement, they had to keep them separate.

In the Jewish worldview, Abraham's children who have received God's law were by default 'holy'. But the Gentiles who have not have the law were at best 'common' or even 'unclean.' The Jews had to keep themselves separate from the gentiles who ate unclean food. So, Peter's statements fly right against their worldview.

Peter was saying: *'While having the law of God is an incredible privilege above all other nations, merely having the law of God does not make us holy, because God looks at the heart. The law and the circumcision we have received as Jews are an external sign of the holiness God requires of us inwardly.'*

2. Peter went on to say, *'But in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.'* (10:35) The gentiles who fear God and do what is right are not 'saved'. 'Acceptable' ('dekos') means 'favourable hearing'. They are on the right footing with God to start a real relationship with Him. If you fear God, it means you already believe God exists, and one day you will have to give an account of your life to Him. This is the right basis for starting a relationship with God. It is very difficult to talk to people who have no fear of God and no awareness of their sins and their need for forgiveness.

Cornelius was a man who had a healthy fear of God and serious about getting his life right with Him. Therefore, God sent an angel to Cornelius so he could hear the message of salvation from Peter and be saved! (11:14)

3. Here is the very first gospel message Peter preached to the Gentiles. There is a difference between his message to the Gentiles and his message to the Jews. Peter does not start with the Law and the prophets. He simply begins with the life and the work of Jesus Christ.

B. Who is Jesus?

1. *'Jesus of Nazareth'* (10:38) was a real person who lived in the land of Israel 2000 years ago. Not some mysterious guru or New Age Jesus who can fit into any religion. E.g., Jesus of the *Oprah Show*, or *Velvet Elvis* (Rob Bell).

Peter divides the life of Jesus into two according to time and place. Peter presents Jesus' life starting from baptism to His death. In terms of ministry, Jesus' ministry began in the 'land of the Jews' (Galilee) and ends in 'Jerusalem' where He was crucified. What did Jesus do after His baptism? *'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.'* (10:38)

Jesus was the very expression of God's heart. He 'healed' and 'delivered' everyone from sickness and oppression of the devil because this was the very heart of God for humanity. Jesus said, *'Thief [the devil] does not come except to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly,'* (John 10:10). However, when Jesus came to Jerusalem, the city of the king, they rejected and murdered Him by hanging Him on a tree.

2. *'He is the Lord of all'* (10:36) – Although they (Jewish and Gentiles courts) tried and judged Jesus to be the worst criminal unworthy to live, God overturned their ruling by raising Jesus from the dead on the third day, and releasing Him from the custody of death and exalted Jesus as the 'Lord of all'. Not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. As the Lord of all, Jesus now rules in heaven with absolute authority! After the death and resurrection, Jesus has shown Himself to be alive to the disciples by eating and drinking

with them for 40 days. During this time Jesus has commissioned the apostles to preach His resurrection until He comes back. Why did Jesus commission apostles to preach Jesus Christ as the Lord of all?

3. *Because 'He is the Judge of all living and the dead' (10:42)* – When Jesus returns, He will judge the living and the dead. Whoever lived on the planet earth will be raised to be judged by Jesus for what they have done in their body. Mankind will be divided into two categories only: 'The living and the dead' (Rev 20:11-15). What will be the basis of this final separation? Whether our sins have been forgiven or remain unforgiven. There is only one person who can forgive our sins - Jesus Christ the sinless Son of God who died for us. No one else has done this. No one else can. Jesus Christ will judge the living and the dead because He is the One who paid for our sins. Those whose sins are forgiven by Jesus Christ will have their names written in the book of life. But for those who are not will be cast into the lake of fire forever. '*And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.*' (Rev 20:15).

This means each person who ever lives on earth must make a choice regarding who Jesus is. Jesus Christ who died for our sins and rose from the dead, who is now the Lord of all, will one day come back to judge everyone. The most important choice each of us must make is whether to come to Jesus Christ now as a sinner and know Him as his Lord and Saviour. Or face Jesus one day with our sins unforgiven as the Judge of all. If we come to know Him as our Lord and Saviour now, we will never have to face Him as the Judge of the living and the dead. Instead, Jesus will become our advocate - defence lawyer. '*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*' (John 5:24)

C. How to Respond to Jesus

1. How then do we choose Jesus and have our sins forgiven? Very simple. Peter said, 'You believe in Him.' This was Peter's last sentence in his message, '*whoever believes in Him will receive the remission of sins*' (v43). Believing in Jesus means agreeing with what God's word says about (a) Who Jesus is; (b) What Jesus did for us on the cross. 'The cross of Christ reveals the love of God at its best and the sin of man at its worst.'
2. What happens to us when we believe in Jesus? We receive the peace of God and enter into relationship with Him. After we make 'peace with God', what follows is the 'peace of God.' Peter said to Cornelius, I came to preach to you the gospel of 'peace' through Jesus Christ (10:36). That is the only way to make peace with God. Those who just fear God and try to do what is right, can never fully enjoy the peace of God because we can never know if we fear God enough or have done enough good. Deep down we know we fail many times. That is why the Gospel of Jesus is the only way we can receive the peace of God.
3. At this point, Peter's message finishes abruptly. Peter was interrupted by the Holy Spirit when he said, '*...through Jesus' name, whoever believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins.*' (10:43) Why? Because Cornelius and his family took hold of the word by faith and the Holy Spirit fell upon them powerfully.

D. Holy Spirit Falls upon the Gentiles

1. No sermon had such a dramatic impact on the hearers. The Holy Spirit suddenly came in power upon all those who were eagerly listening to Peter's message, and they burst out in tongues (Aramaic?), and they began praising God (10:46). For the first time, Cornelius' reverence and fear of God were transformed into praises, thanksgiving, and deep love for God. The Holy Spirit brought peace and love like a flood in their hearts. And they could not keep silent. They had to sing on top of their voices. Which other religion sings to God? Rather than religious chanting, we have joyful singing in worship. '*The perfect love casts out all fear.*' (1 John 4:18) Loving God and praising God is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit!
2. This happened so suddenly that Peter didn't get to tell them they must repent from sins. Peter did not have time to tell them about other Jewish laws either – how to eat the right kind of food and keep themselves clean. God bypassed them all and poured out the Holy Spirit on them, just as soon as they heard the gospel and believed in their hearts. It was so unusual that the six Jewish believers who witnessed this 'astonished' (10:45-46). These Gentile converts' spiritual progress was much too fast to be comfortable! It looked like God was in a hurry. God was hungry to receive the Gentiles as His own holy

people along with Jewish believers. God did not even wait until they got baptised in water! And Peter's vision was fulfilled before their eyes.

3. Peter said at the beginning of the message, *'God has no favourites'* and *'God only looks at the heart'*, not whether we are Jews or Gentiles, young or old, race or colour, etc. God fulfilled Peter's message by pouring out His Spirit on them in a hurry. What do you do about teaching them to live *'ceremonially clean'* life according to the Old Testament law? It is obsolete. They already received the Holy Spirit without any of these things. It almost feels like water baptism was a catch-up step they must follow. Thank God, Peter baptised every one in Cornelius' household without any delay. Baptism is how we express our personal faith in Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

E. Peter's Defence in Jerusalem

1. When Peter got back to Jerusalem he got into trouble because he stayed with the Gentiles for a few days and ate with them (11:3 c.f. 10:48). The church did not like their pastor mixing with the wrong crowd who were common or even unclean. The same taboo that bothered Peter initially also bothered the Jewish brothers.
2. Peter explained to them the whole story starting from the beginning how God led him to this point of baptising Cornelius' household so quickly - the vision with the large sheet coming down from heaven with all kinds of unclean animals, repeated three times, followed by the inner voice of the Holy Spirit that God sent three men to escort Peter to preach the good news to the hungry souls in Cornelius' household. It was an accurate revelation. Finally, God poured out His Spirit on the Gentiles while Peter was preaching as if they were already *'clean'*! How else can the Holy Spirit be given to them? Later Peter looks back and says these words, *'So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.'* (15:9)
3. I believe Peter has finally understood the meaning of the vision. Peter was very hungry when he received the vision because he could not eat well in Simon the tanner's house due to his fear of the unclean. But it was actually God who was hungry to receive the Gentile into His kingdom. Peter said earlier, *'I just realised that I should not call any man common or unclean.'* (10:28) Also, *I just realised that 'God has no favourites – but He looks at the hearts.'* (10:34).

Then as Peter was preaching God has proven His acceptance of the gentiles as holy people and equal members of the church in the most emphatic way. How? By giving them the Holy Spirit as He had given to the believing Jews. Peter told the Jewish brothers in Jerusalem. *'If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?'* (11:17) *'When they heard these things, they became silent and they glorified God saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.'*

I thank God for these Jewish brothers stretched their hearts and minds to accept us, Gentiles. Later on, in Jerusalem Council, Peter said the most amazing thing about how Jews and Gentiles are saved - *'through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we (Jews) shall be saved in the same manner as they (Gentiles)'* (15:11)