

The House of Cornelius

Gentiles Become Part of the Body of Christ

A Study in Acts Chapter 10



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Acts Chapter 10

The Conversion of Cornelius and the Gentiles

Peter was greatly used of God as the Lord Jesus predicted to His followers in the Upper Room discourse. He said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12). Peter, in his apostolic function, was a foundation piece of the Church: “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20). When it comes to spoken and written revelation, the foundation of the Church was the apostles and prophets. Revelation did not come to us directly through the Lord Jesus, but it did come to us through the apostles and New Testament prophets. The Lord Jesus is the foundation of the Church when it comes to salvation (1 Cor. 3:11). Salvation is exclusively based on His finished work on the cross, confirmed by His resurrection from the dead. Christ Jesus the Lord is God’s perfect Saviour, but His work is revealed and explained by the Holy Spirit through the writings of the apostles and New Testament prophets.

Peter, therefore, was serving Christ appropriately, all through these early chapters of Acts. When we come to chapter 13 we will see that Peter fades out and Paul becomes the primary focus. In one sense Paul is the greatest of all the apostles because he labored more abundantly than all of them (1 Cor. 15:10). One’s labor of love is a measuring stick of greatness because our Lord said, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matt. 23:11). The self-sacrificing servant will be properly rewarded at the Bema Seat of Christ. God will evaluate those who have done significant, effective, and God-honoring works (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15). He is the One who searches our hearts, tests our works and grants His rewards. May we be good and faithful servants!

Peter raised Tabitha (Dorcas) from the dead, as we learned in chapter 9. Following this Peter stayed many days in Joppa with Simon a tanner (Acts 9:43), a shocking action for a Jew. A tanner would be anathema to a Jew because he would spend much of his time handling dead animals. If a Jew were to come in contact with the dead bodies of animals this contact would result in ceremonial uncleanness. Simon the tanner was situated by the seaside (Acts 10:6) where he could have access to salt water which would help him process these animal skins. He would make shoes and clothing and other leather products. Why would God lead Peter to such a house, to stay with such a man? This was the first step in opening Peter’s eyes to a wider world. It was a wider world filled with Gentiles who needed Christ!

Acts 10:1

Caesarea means “the city of Caesar,” and was named after Caesar Augustus.¹ This city was built by that monster of iniquity, Herod the Great, prior to the birth of Christ. It was a major port and the

¹This is not to be confused with another city, Caesarea Philippi, located inland, north of the Sea of Galilee.

political center of the Roman government in the Holy Land. Many Gentiles resided there. It was the Roman capital of Judea wherein were found magnificent public buildings. Philip was already living there at this time (Acts 8:40; 21:8).² This city was on the Mediterranean coast about 34 miles north of Joppa (present day Jaffa). Like other Roman governors of Judaea, Pontius Pilate made his primary residence in Caesarea, going to Jerusalem mainly for major feasts in order to make an appearance and maintain order. Of course, Pilate was no longer governor of Judaea during the events described in Acts chapter 10.

Some have suggested that Cornelius was named in honor of a man who lived a hundred years earlier by the name of Cornelius Sela who liberated 10,000 slaves. The Cornelius of Acts 10 might have been a descendant of a slave that Cornelius Sela had liberated.

A centurion was the captain of a company of 100 soldiers. There were six of these companies in a cohort (a regiment of 600 soldiers) and there would be ten cohorts in a legion. Thus a legion would have 6,000 soldiers. This is how the Roman army was organized. Rome had one of the greatest armies the world has ever known. During the height of the Empire, it was unconquerable. The Roman army was not always in a hurry, but what it did, it did with amazing thoroughness and effectiveness, even as the Jews would discover to their horror within the next generation. It did not pay to rebel against the Roman government!

The “Italian band” means that the soldiers under the charge of Cornelius were Romans from Italy.

Cornelius resembled another centurion we read about in Luke 7:5—“He loves our nation and has built a synagogue for us.” The Lord Jesus healed this centurion’s servant and praised him for his great faith (Luke 7:9). Also we cannot forget the centurion who witnessed the crucifixion, and exclaimed, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27:54).

Acts 10:2

You might expect this centurion to be a hardened, cruel person, but it is surprising that God often had nice things to say about Roman officers. They often turned out to be the heroes while the Jewish leaders were the villains. One might say, “Well, Luke who wrote the book of Acts was prejudiced because he was a Gentile.” No, the Holy Spirit wrote this book; Luke was just His human instrument! Yet, it is of interest that many Jews turned out to be very bad people compared to the average Gentile that was personally described in this book.

The term “devout” [eusebēs] describes a person who has reverence and awe directed toward God.³ The word is later used to describe Ananias (Acts 22:12). Cornelius revered and feared God, along with the members of his household, which may also have included his servants. He showed

²Since he was already living there, why didn’t God use Philip to reach the Gentiles instead of Peter? Peter was given the “keys of the kingdom” (Matt. 16:19), and it was Peter’s responsibility to open the door of faith to the Gentiles, even as he had done previously to the Jews and to the Samaritans.

³This term eusebēs (devout) is related to the word eusebōs which means godly. The godly man is the man who reverences God and exhibits God-fearing conduct.

mercy to the needy and shared his wealth in order to meet their needs. He came before God bringing his desires and prayers continually. He was regular in his prayer habits. He also was a God-fearing and God-conscious man. Cornelius was seeking to know the Lord, and “the seeking Savior (Luke 19:10) will find the seeking sinner (Jer. 29:13).”⁴ He lived up to the light that he had, but he needed more light.

Some suggest that Cornelius may have been a “proselyte of the gate,” meaning that he was a semi-proselyte to the Jewish religion, accepting some Jewish practices (such as praying at the ninth hour, v. 3), but not becoming circumcised. Whatever the case, he was still considered an uncircumcised Gentile and not a Jew (compare Acts 11:1; 15:7).

Acts 10:3

The ninth hour was about 3:00 o’clock in the afternoon, the normal time of prayer.⁵ Cornelius experienced a vision from God during the day, not a dream at night. An angel of the Lord communicated to him with a message from on high. God was in control of this situation.

According to Jewish reckoning, the first hour begins at sunrise. Noon would be the sixth hour and 3:00 o’clock would be the ninth hour. The Lord Jesus was put on the cross at the third hour (9:00 a.m.) and died at the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.). See Mark 15:25 and Matthew 27:45. The work of creation took place in six days; the work of redemption took place in six hours. Praise the Savior who both made us and made provision to save us!

Acts 10:4

It did not take a lot of discussion and evidences to convince Cornelius that he was talking with someone from heaven above, someone sent from the true God of heaven. “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.”⁶ Wait a minute! Was not Cornelius converted later in this chapter? The answer is “Yes” and “No.” The book of Acts is a transitional book, and there are instances in Acts where we find born-again people becoming Christians. The apostles themselves were born-again men (John 13:10), but in Acts chapter 2, these born-again apostles became Christians, that is, members of the body and bride of Christ by the miracle of spiritual baptism (compare Acts 1:5).

⁴Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary (NT)*, Volume 1, p. 446. Of course, in seeking sinners, Christ takes the initiative (Luke 19:10). We sought Him because He first sought us!

⁵The ninth hour was also the hour in the day when our Lord died (Matt. 27:46).

⁶A “memorial” (Acts 10:3). This means God would be mindful of the prayers and merciful deeds done by Cornelius. These acts were not done in vain. God took note of and recorded such acts. The same word is used in Matthew 26:13 of Mary’s act of anointing Jesus. This act would be recorded in the gospel record and “be told for a memorial of her.” God is not unrighteous to forget the work and labor of love done by His people (Heb. 6:10). Those who have believed in God need to be careful to maintain good works (Tit. 3:8).

Cornelius was a devout man, a born-again person, who was not a Jew. He believed in the God of Israel. At the time of the Babylonian captivity, Jewish people were dispersed among the heathen Babylonians. The worship of the Jewish people was in sharp contrast with the abysmal depravity of the Gentiles exhibited by their pagan worship forms. The Jewish worship of the one true God was fascinating to some of these Gentiles who were attracted to synagogues and to some extent to the true God. Some of these Gentiles became believers in the one true God, by way of the regeneration of the Holy Spirit.

Cornelius was trusting God, living up to the light he had. An unbeliever would not have his prayers and alms and offerings coming up as a pleasing memorial before God. We do not gain favor with God by the things we do. Even the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord (Prov. 15:8). So we need to understand the status of Cornelius before God even prior to the time that Peter came to him: “He belonged to that class of Gentiles who, illumined by the Holy Spirit, had turned to God from idols, to serve the true and the living God. He was godly and a converted man before Peter ever came to him and preached the Gospel in his house.”⁷ And yet mysteriously he was not yet “saved” in the complete sense (see Acts 11:14).

Think of how significant our prayers really are before our Father who resides in the third heaven. At times we get discouraged and we do not see what we think should be immediate, spectacular answers to our prayers, and our hearts tend to faint within us. We should remember Philippians 4:18 where the prayers of the Philippians were an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable and well pleasing to God! The prayers and alms of Cornelius were accepted by God in a similar manner. Do not give up and do not lose heart. Make your requests known unto God and He will answer those prayers perfectly if we ask them in Jesus’ Name, that is, honoring His Name and Person, according to His will and His Word.

In Romans 8:26-27 we read that the Spirit of God intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. The Spirit of God takes the feeble words offered by the humble believer and edits them and purges them of selfish and unbiblical motives and perspectives, and He makes them acceptable to God the Father, even as a sweet-smelling sacrifice rising to heaven. He doesn’t say, “How wonderful to hear the prayer of this saint!” What we offer to God comes up infinitely short of what the Holy Spirit deems acceptable.

There was another centurion who was probably praying to God in sincerity and truth. He was found at the scene of the cross where he cried out, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matt. 27:54) There were other centurions described in the gospels whom Jesus honored for their faith (Luke 7:5). We wonder how often Cornelius had opportunities to share his faith with the hundred soldiers under his command. It was the “Italian band.” To what extent did it become a God-fearing Italian band?

Acts 10:5

Joppa is a 34-mile trip from Caesarea. Simon’s surname was given to him by the Lord as seen in John 1:42 (Cephas=Peter=stone). Peter was in Joppa where he would soon be sent as a preacher to the Gentiles. Likewise, another man was once told to preach to the Gentiles, but instead of

⁷Arno Gaebelien, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 195.

obeying God's command, Jonah went to this same city Joppa and there boarded a ship rather than preach to the Gentiles at Nineveh (Jonah 1:1-3).

Acts 10:6

Two Simons were staying in the same house, Simon Peter, and the owner of the house, Simon the tanner. Cornelius lacked needed light; Peter would provide the light he needed.

Acts 10:7

Notice that the particular soldier sent on this mission was also described as "devout." Here was at least one of the hundred soldiers who was a believer. The household servants were probably believers also. Cornelius had a godly influence over those that served under him. He had a relationship with the living God that they wanted also.

Acts 10:8

These three men (one soldier and two servants) were sent on their mission to find Peter in Joppa, as God had instructed him through the angel (v. 5).

Acts 10:9

The Spirit of God perfectly coordinated these people, their activities and the timing of it all, right down to the very minute, even though they were miles apart from each other. The time Peter prayed was noon.⁸ It would be difficult for most of us to pray on top of our roofs because of the sloping angle. It would not be safe at all. But housetops in ancient Israel were flat, and the roof became a place of worship and praise; however, for some it was the place of wicked star-worship. Ezekiel and Jeremiah tell us that prior to the coming of Nebuchadnezzar, the Jews went onto their housetops and prayed to the sun, moon, and stars to protect them from the impending Babylonian invasion. That sealed their doom. It was as if God were saying, "You have never learned who your God really is. You will now witness your temple and city being destroyed. Those of you who survive will be deported to Babylon for 70 years." God was now ready to deal with Peter in a special way.

Acts 10:10

Vine's definition of a "trance" is excellent: "a condition in which ordinary consciousness and the perception of natural circumstances were withheld, and the soul was susceptible only to the vision imparted by God."⁹ The same word is used in Acts 11:5 (of Peter) and 22:17 (of Paul).

⁸The hours, in Jewish reckoning, were counted from sunrise (around 6:00 a.m. our time), so the 6th hour would be about noon. See discussion under Acts 10:3.

⁹*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, see under "TRANCE."

Acts 10:11

Described for us is a very unique vessel, a sheet-like container holding a host of animals. The emphasis is not on the vessel but on what the vessel contained. It was a linen cloth in the form of a sheet or sail. Today we might call it a huge, heavy-duty tarpaulin or tarp. The sheet was lowered down to the earth by its four corners.¹⁰ The sheet symbolized mankind. The four corners of the sheet represented the four corners of the earth, and the whole human race was symbolized by the contents of this great sheet.

Acts 10:12

Peter must have been shocked to see what was in this great sheet. All kinds of unclean animals were found therein, including swine, owls, lobsters, insects, lizards and squid. We assume that these creatures were unclean based on Peter's comment in Acts 10:14. He did not say, "Thank You, Lord, but I'll only kill and eat the kosher (clean) animals."¹¹ A list of clean and unclean animals is found in Leviticus chapter 11.

Acts 10:13-14

God converted Peter from an exclusive Jew who practiced separation from Gentiles to a God-honoring, Gentile-accepting Biblical ecumenist. He was ecumenical in a good sense; the Greek word *oikoumenē* refers to all the inhabited earth. Peter recognized that the whole human race was now to be accepted as being worthy of fellowship, as long as the fellowship was based on a real and right relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ. A whole new dispensation was coming to fruition as the gospel was going into all the world, to Jews and non-Jews alike. The barrier was broken down (Eph. 2:13-18).

This is stage three in Peter's opening of the door of faith. We have already seen the first two stages. The first stage was in Acts 2 when the door of faith was opened to the Jews. The second stage was in Acts 8 as the door of faith was opened to the Samaritans (half Jews). And now in Acts 10 Gentiles were welcomed into God's Church. The Ethiopian eunuch was a token of this as he was welcomed by Philip into the body and bride of Christ, confirmed and symbolized by his water baptism.¹² However, the eunuch's conversion was not a publicly witnessed event in Israel. Here in Acts 10 we have a public event inside of Israel involving many Gentile people, not just one man.

¹⁰The KJV has "a great sheet knit" but there is no word in the Greek text which means "knit." The NASB renders the verse as follows: "And he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground."

¹¹Some Bible teachers, such as Arno Gaebelein, believe that both clean and unclean animals were on this sheet, representing both Jews and Gentiles (all mankind). This view is certainly possible; the Bible does not specifically say one way or the other.

¹²The Ethiopian eunuch may have been a Jewish proselyte to some extent, and if so, not considered a full Gentile.

The entrance of these Gentiles into the Church was very visible and prominent and spectacular, as witnessed by the Jews who were present. This was the conversion of Gentiles who were not told they would have to become Jews. Cornelius and his household found total acceptance into the body and bride of Christ.

Cornelius and those with him are some of the people Jesus talked about in John 10:16—“Other sheep I have which are not of this fold (not of Judaism).” The Lord Jesus has other sheep made up of Gentile believers, which in time would greatly outnumber the Jewish believers. Today we are accustomed to having Gentiles come to know Christ and become Christians, but we need to remember how these early Jews looked at this. They were amazed that a Gentile could become a genuine Christian without becoming a Jew. This was a tremendous shock to their way of thinking, during this significant transition period in the book of Acts.

Peter was told to “rise, kill and eat,” a command which Peter, a strict Jew, would have found repulsive. Peter’s response was typical: “Not so, Lord.” It is not wise to use this combination of words! You can say, “Not so” to a finite being, but do not try saying this to the One who is Lord of all. If He is truly Lord, then we must say, “Yes, Lord, let it be according to Your Word” (compare Luke 1:38).¹³ “If He is Lord, it is not for us to say, ‘Not so,’ but to give Him wholehearted obedience.”¹⁴ Peter was a hard nut to crack. However, we love Peter because he was so much like the rest of us! Remember what Peter did in Matthew 16 after Jesus told him of His impending death: “Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee’” (Matt. 16:22). Peter tried to help the Lord by giving Him counsel. Jesus graciously and lovingly replied, “Get thee behind Me Satan!” (Matt. 16:23). Jesus loved him so much that He told him the truth!

Another example is in John 13 where Jesus washed the feet of the disciples. When He came to Peter, Peter said, “Not so, Lord”: “You’re not going to wash my feet, are You?” (John 13:6). Jesus lovingly and graciously replied, “If I do not wash your feet, then you have no part with Me.” So then, Peter’s over-the-top response was to have the Lord wash everything, to give him a complete bath! Peter totally misunderstood what the Lord was doing. Most of us relate well to Peter. “Lord, if You can use that kind of person, then maybe there is hope for me!”

You would think that by the time of Cornelius’ visit, God would say, “Peter, I’ve had enough of your ‘Not so’ complaints. You are done! You are fired! Not counting Judas, you are the worst apostle I have ever chosen!”

Peter said, “I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” Lord, don’t You know what kind of a person I am? I am a kosher Jew. I have always obeyed Your dietary rules in Leviticus chapter 11. Who do You think You are talking to?”

We recognize that the Old Testament is full of warnings against eating unclean, non-kosher foods. Leviticus 11 recorded the whole menu of things that were not to be eaten, and this became a major

¹³If Peter’s salvation had depended on his surrender and submission to the Lordship of Christ, he would have flunked in this instance. Lordship salvation is unbiblical; Lordship sanctification is essential for holy living.

¹⁴H. A. Ironside, *Acts* [Loizeaux Brothers, New Jersey, 1982], p. 249.

issue in the Old Testament. However, when Jesus appeared on the scene, He declared that all foods were then clean (Mark 7:19). These words anticipated the ending of the Old Testament Mosaic legislation for Israel pertaining to foods clean and unclean. See also Colossians 2:16—“Let no man judge you in food or drink.” Such dietary regulations had ended!

We have trouble imagining what it would have been like for a Jew to experience such a change. Peter described it this way, “Are we going to put on these Gentiles the burden that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear?” (paraphrased from Acts 15:10) Not one Jew had totally fulfilled the Old Testament legal guidelines and law of Moses. God knew it was impossible for sinful men to obey these laws. Indeed Jesus said, “None of you keep the law” (John 7:19). What then was the law for? It was a schoolmaster to show the Israelites that they could not be saved by their works or by their obedience. They could be saved only by God’s grace which was symbolized by the Levitical sacrificial system. No one could ever fulfill the 613 commandments. Peter himself admitted that in Acts 15:10. No Jew, including Peter, ever kept the law perfectly.

Acts 10:15

What God has cleansed, do not call that common or unclean!

Since Peter had never eaten anything that was not kosher, he balked at such an unholy smorgasbord. His protest was understandable in the light of his upbringing. Any serious Jew would have reacted in the same way. In the boundaries of the vision, it is doubtful that Peter understood the significance of the heavenly explanation: “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

How could things that had been unclean for thousands of years suddenly become clean? Peter was trying to wrap his mind around these things. He would get further help.

Acts 10:16

This sheet object lesson was carried out three times. Three is a significant number for Peter. Three times he denied his Lord. Three times by the Sea of Galilee Jesus asked him, “Do you love me, Peter?” and three times he confessed that he loved the Lord (John 21:15-17). It was hard to get through to Peter. He needed to hear things more than once. And so it is with many of us. How impressed we should be with the Lord’s gracious and patient loving care for Peter.

Twice more the grotesque sheet descended, compounding Peter’s misery and perplexity. We have all experienced the horror of a nightmare. Imagine what this bizarre vision meant to this devoted apostle. The four corners of the sheet in the vision corresponded to the four points of the compass: north, south, east and west. The sheet’s contents indicated the swarming millions that populated the earth, mostly pagan Gentiles. This would have included Cornelius, all his soldiers, all his servants, all the Roman people, and all the other nations on the face of the earth. All mankind was bound up together in one loathsome bundle, and Peter was gazing at this scene in utter revulsion.

It is hard for us to understand the enormity of the shock that took place in the mind of this great apostle, and what this means for us today. The three-fold object lesson did not solve everything, for in the next verse we find that Peter was still perplexed as to what all this meant.

Acts 10:17

In spite of a threefold revelation from God on this subject, Peter was still doubting! He was still wondering what all this meant. The word “doubt” [diaporeō] means to be inwardly perplexed. Peter just did not understand the meaning of the vision. The explanation was soon on its way.

Notice God’s amazing and wonderful timing. At that exact moment the three men sent by Cornelius arrived. It was not mere coincidence that these men arrived at just that moment. God’s perfect timing is seen in other places in God’s Word. For example, 1) Abraham was about to slay his beloved Isaac, but the Lord restrained him before the act was completed. At that very moment a ram’s horns got entangled in a thicket (Gen. 22:13). A fortuitous circumstance? No, it was God. 2) Joseph’s brothers threw him into a pit and right then a caravan of traders “happened” to come by headed for Egypt (Gen. 37:24-25). Otherwise the entire history of Israel would have been different! 3) The daughter of Pharaoh came down to the river just at the right time to rescue a baby in a basket (Exodus 2:3,5). 4) After Peter’s third denial, God’s remarkable timing was seen in a twofold manner: a) Immediately the cock sounded (Luke 22:60); b) Perhaps even more amazing, the Lord, being led different places by His captors, appeared in the courtyard at that very moment and looked at Peter with a piercing glance (Luke 22:61). Who but our great God can so perfectly arrange such events? Dear saint, how wonderful to know that all our ways are ordered by the Lord. God’s timing is always perfect!

The issue at hand was more than just unclean food now made clean.¹⁵ The application was to unclean people (Gentiles) who could now avail themselves of full cleansing and forgiveness on the basis of faith in Christ apart from Jewish circumcision (Acts 10:43).

Acts 10:18

They made sure they were at the right house. They asked Simon the tanner if he knew where Simon Peter was.

Acts 10:19

As we have seen already, the number three is a common theme in this chapter. God gave Peter this object lesson three times and now there are three men to talk to him.

Acts 10:20

“Peter, stop your doubting. Go with them without any kind of hesitation. Simply follow My leading because I have sent these men.” The term “doubting” means “making no distinctions” (Vine). Do not make a distinction between Jew and Gentile. There is no difference. Both groups are sinners

¹⁵Most scholars believe that Peter assisted Mark in providing material for his gospel. We sense Peter’s contribution in Mark 7:19—“This He said, making all meats clean.”

(Rom. 3:22-23) and both groups need salvation. (Rom. 10:12—“For **there is no difference** between the Jew and the Gentile: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him.”)

Acts 10:21

Peter queried, “What is the reason for your visit?” Everything about these events was divinely planned. God was working out everything in order to get Peter and Cornelius connected.

Acts 10:22

They pointed to the respectability and the credibility of their master, Cornelius. They told Peter three things about Cornelius: 1) He was a righteous man; 2) He was a God-fearing man; 3) He had a good testimony among all the Jewish people who knew him, who highly respected him and who viewed him as a friend, not as an enemy. These facts helped to alleviate Peter’s serious doubts about this adventure. Peter was told that all this was arranged by a holy angel of God. God’s hand was in this entire process. Peter was to go to the house of Cornelius and Peter was told that while there, they would hear a message from him. Peter must have been thinking, “They are expecting a message from me. What am I going to say to these Gentiles?”

Acts 10:23

You can imagine what the Jewish neighbors were thinking then. Not only was Simon Peter lodging with a tanner who worked with dead animals, but now also Gentiles were coming to stay with them. Normally Jews had no dealings with the Gentiles and would never eat with them and lodge them overnight. The Jews would have seriously frowned on such things.

The word “lodge” means to receive as a guest, to entertain strangers. The same word is used in Hebrews 13:2—“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” It is a reference to Abraham’s amazing hospitality shown to the Lord and to two angels recorded in Genesis 18:1-8. Peter showed amazing hospitality to his Gentiles guests, something that Jewish people would never do.

Certain Jewish brethren from Joppa accompanied Peter. From Acts 11:12 we learn that there were six of them. These were six Jewish believers who would go with Peter as witnesses of a major divine event. These six men, in addition to Peter and in addition to the three men from Cornelius, made a delegation of 10 persons traveling to the home of Cornelius in Caesarea. Seven Jews were about to collide with a household of seeking Gentiles. It would turn out to be a wonderful collision.

Acts 10:24

As mentioned earlier, the distance from Joppa to Caesarea was about 34 miles. Cornelius had quite a group of people gathered there, made up of relatives and friends who were Gentiles. They were full of expectations.

Acts 10:25-26

Peter did not allow Cornelius to worship him. Only God is worthy of worship. Most of Peter's so-called successors in Rome have not objected to such adulation. "It would be fitting if all self-appointed 'successors' of Peter would imitate his humility by forbidding people to kneel before them!"¹⁶ How appalling and blasphemous that mere men are given titles such as "His Worship," "His Grace," "His Reverence," "His Eminence," "His Holiness."¹⁷ Later in Lystra, the pagans fell down to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods. Paul and Barnabas were horrified and tore their garments. It is very dangerous for any person to fail to give God His proper glory. If we do not think so, we should ask King Herod (Acts 12:20-23). Here, Peter was horrified that another man should bow in worship before him.

This is a major issue in the New Testament. Have you rightly identified the one you are worshiping? If the one you are worshiping is anyone other than the true and living God, then such worship is to be strongly condemned. Cornelius prostrated himself out of deep respect and appreciation for Peter's visit, but he had to be corrected.

Peter's response came swiftly: "Stand up; I myself also am a man!" Don't you dare do things like this to tempt me. We recall that the Apostle John had a problem twice in the book of Revelation (Rev. 19:10; 22:8) where he worshiped whom he thought was God and it turned out to be a mere angel, and he had to be immediately corrected by the heavenly being.

The fact that a mere man should never be worshiped, coupled with the fact that Jesus Christ was indeed worshiped, is an excellent proof that Jesus Christ is not a mere man, but rather He is the God-Man. Consider the following:

¹⁶William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, p. 1613.

¹⁷See Arno Gaebelein, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 202.

Worship is Rendered to Christ Which Belongs Only to the True God

The following is adapted from Dr. Alva McClain's notes, revised by Dr. John Whitcomb and Ivan French, and used by permission of Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Indiana:

A. The Bible clearly teaches that such worship belongs to God alone, and is never to be rendered to any creature, no matter how exalted that creature may be.

Apostles refused worship (Acts 14:11-15).

Peter refused worship (Acts 10:25-26).

Angels refused worship (Revelation 19:10; 22:8,9).

Christ commanded men to worship God alone (Matthew 4:8-10).

Men are punished for accepting what belongs only to God (Acts 12:21-33).

B. Yet this same Bible teaches that Christ is to be worshiped as God.

1. Christ accepted and encouraged such worship.

Matthew 14:31-33

Matthew 15:25-28

Matthew 28:9-10

Matthew 28:16-18

John 9:35-39

2. Christ demanded such worship.

John 5:23

3. The Father commands such worship of Christ.

Hebrews 1:6

4. Christ will actually be worshiped by the host of heaven. See Revelation 5:8

5. This worship of Christ will finally become universal.

Philippians 2:10-11 (All men will someday bow the knee to Christ.)

Acts 10:27

Many had gathered at the home of Cornelius. Some people think that the "many" included little children or babies, and they see this as an example of "household salvation." This wrong teaching supposes that if the parents believe then the children are automatically saved also. They sometimes try to base this on Acts 2:39, "for the promise is unto you and your children." What does that mean?

It must mean that the promise is also to your children if they also believe. The passage goes on to say, “and to all that are afar off” (Acts 2:39). Certainly this does not mean that if you believe, then everybody far off will be automatically saved also! Indeed, everybody far off can be saved but only if they likewise believe. So the point is this: every member of your household can be saved, but only if they believe. Household salvation is unbiblical, even as we shall see later when we study Acts 16:31.¹⁸

Acts 10:28

For the Jews it was unlawful for to keep company or have fellowship with those belonging to Gentile nations. But through his trice-repeated vision Peter learned that he should not call any man common or unclean. Peter was getting the message. It was a monumental hurdle that Peter was clearing. This may have been the first time Peter was ever in a Gentile house. “Peter had made the application. If the God who made the distinction between clean and unclean creatures had removed that distinction, it meant He had also removed the distinction between clean and unclean peoples. This was a major transition in Peter’s thinking, and it led to a transition in his responses.”¹⁹

Acts 10:29

Peter came to them without gainsaying (KJV), that is, without raising any questions or objections, without hesitation or reluctance. It is helpful to put ourselves into Peter’s shoes and to realize the awesome transformation that God was now accomplishing within his mind. In Ephesians chapter 2 we read these statements about Gentiles: “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands, that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:11-12). You cannot be worse off than that! That was the typical Gentile two thousand years ago. “But now in Christ Jesus ye who were formerly far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ for He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in Himself of two (Jew and Gentile) one new man, so making peace. And that He might reconcile both (Jew and Gentile) unto God in one body (the Church) by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Eph. 2:13-16). This was the great mystery revealed by Paul in Ephesians 3:4-6, that there could be one body, composed of Jews and Gentiles on an equal basis before God. The Gentiles were now fellow citizens with the Jewish saints, and fully recognized as members of the household and family of God (Eph. 2:19).

These concepts were revolutionary when they were first announced in the first century. Today, we as saved Gentiles do not find it a great curiosity that we are equal with Jewish believers. The novelty

¹⁸While Acts 16:31 states that the jailer’s household would be saved, Acts 16:34 makes it clear that his household believed. Thus, Acts 16:31 may be paraphrased and amplified as follows: “If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be saved, and if your household believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, they will be saved also.”

¹⁹J. Dwight Pentecost, *New Wine—A Study of Transition in the Book of Acts*, p. 107.

of this wonderful truth has worn off. Today the ratio of Jews and Gentiles in the Church is quite different. Today we rejoice greatly when even one Jew becomes a Christian. Many Christian assemblies today have no saved Jews among their membership. A Hebrew Christian is relatively rare today, sad to say.

After the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Jews were no longer a threat to Gentile Christians. As time progressed, Gentile Christians started to vastly outnumber the Jews. Paul anticipated that would happen. In Romans 11 he warned the Gentile believers not to become arrogant toward the natural branches. They can be grafted back in again and someday they will be. The Jewish people will have a vital part in God's future program, a fact which amillennialists and Reformed men have been denying for centuries. In Acts 10 Jewish Christians were dominant; today Gentile believers are dominant. This is why it is difficult to go back to the early chapters of Acts and relive through Peter and the apostles the tremendous tension which existed back then. Can a Gentile really become acceptable to God without becoming a circumcised Jew?

Peter said, "God told me that I am not to count any man as common or unclean!" He finally figured out what the sheet object lesson meant! One humble saint put himself among all of those unclean, horrible animals and said, "That is what I am in the sight of God. I am an unclean, creeping thing which God graciously included in His wonderful plan of salvation. And by His grace God made me a new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17)."

Acts 10:30

This is the first we learn about Cornelius fasting. Not only did he pray, but he went without food.

The angel stood before him in bright clothing. This is a typical description of angels. Angels are spectacular reflectors of the glory of God from whose presence they have descended to the darkness of this earth. Angels often appear in the form of men in white or bright clothing (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4; Acts 1:10).

Acts 10:31

God heard the prayer of Cornelius and remembered his deeds of mercy. God is not unrighteous to forget those deeds done in His Name (Heb. 6:10).

Acts 10:32-33

Both Peter and Cornelius had received messages from God—Cornelius by an angel and Peter by a vision. It was obvious God was bringing these two men together for a great purpose.

You cannot have a more prepared audience! They recognized God's presence and knew that God was doing something special. They were ready to hear and they were ready to obey. Oh that this attitude might be found in every assembly where believers gather—"we are all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded by God!"

This group of seekers was certainly prepared by God to hear the gospel. “The Sandwich Islands were very much in this state when the American missionaries first visited them. They had thrown away their idols, and seemed to be *waiting* for the message of mercy and the word of eternal life, as Cornelius was.”²⁰



Peter never had such a receptive group of listeners. Here was a potential church in the making. The door of faith was about to be opened to the Gentiles. The first cross-cultural Bible study group had now assembled together.

Acts 10:34

Peter opened his mouth! We might think, “Oh no!” Often when Peter opened his mouth it was a disaster, such as earlier in this chapter when he said, “Not so, Lord!” But this time Peter was prepared by God and many good things came out of his mouth, even as was true when he preached at Pentecost (Acts 2). Whenever Peter’s mouth was under God’s control, it was a wonderful instrument. The same is true of each of us! Prayerfully and in dependence upon God, may we speak the truth in love.

God is not a respecter of persons! How thankful we should be for this truth. In Deuteronomy 10:17 we learn that God “regardeth not persons” (also 2 Chron. 19:7). That is, God does not play favorites and does not show partiality. He does not make any distinction between the rich and the poor and widows and orphans and strangers or foreigners. God makes gracious and generous provision all

²⁰Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament—Acts*, pages 170-171.

through the history of Israel. God told them to take care of strangers because they were once strangers in Egypt for hundreds of years. There is no religion in the world that can compare to God's true revelation even as set forth in the law of Moses when it comes to kindness and fairness and graciousness. God is not a respecter of persons. You cannot bribe Him. You cannot impress God by wealth, power, or intellectual brilliance. God does not operate that way. King Jehoshaphat echoed what God had said in Deuteronomy when he told the judges the following: "...there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts" (2 Chron. 19:7). No one should ever allow himself to be manipulated or bribed by someone in order to pervert justice in Israel! Oh that this were true in our nation today!

The expression "respecter of persons" comes from a Greek word which means "to receive (someone's) face." In other words, it means to act differently towards a person because of his face or his outward appearance or his external circumstances (situations that people are in and that they cannot change). If I am a respecter of persons then this means that I make a difference in the way I treat a person because of outward things (things that are not really that important). I might look down on someone because of the way he looks, the way he dresses, the color of his skin, the country he is from, his family background, his religious background, how rich he is, how popular or famous he is, how powerful he is, and so forth. One of the reasons God is not a respecter of persons is found in 1 Samuel 16:7: "But the LORD said unto Samuel, 'Look not on his countenance (his outward appearance), or on the height of his stature (how tall and powerful he seems to be from man's point of view), because I have refused him; for the LORD sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, **but the LORD looks on the heart.**'" Because God is not a respecter of persons, nationality or religious background make no difference (Acts 10:34-35).

Acts 10:35

This is a difficult verse. What this verse says is a fitting description of Cornelius. In every nation there are Gentile believers, with various levels of knowledge. This is touched upon briefly in Romans chapter 2. If a Gentile does those things that honor God, and if a Jew, who should know God, does those things that do not honor God, then God will accept the Gentile and not the Jew. Of course we have to be careful as to what this means. It simply means what Paul said in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile." That is, God is not making that kind of distinction any longer. Any person in the world who worships the one true God in spirit and in truth is totally accepted by Him, even though he is far from Israel with all of its ordinances and distinctives. The Ethiopian eunuch serves as another example. He came from a far country (Cush) to worship the one true God, and God accepted that man. His works of righteousness are equivalent to those works spoken of by James (James 2:14-26) which give evidence that one's faith is genuine.

The one who fears God and works righteousness has been accepted by God, that is, has been regarded favorably by God. This does not mean that in order to be accepted by God a sinner must do righteous works. That is putting the cart before the horse. That would be salvation by works and such good works can never gain a man favor with God (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). Seeking to be saved by fearing God and working righteousness is a futile effort because as God looks at all humanity He sees that 1) "there is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18); 2) "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). Due to our utter depravity, none of us qualify!

Peter is describing the man who has been accepted by God; he is not setting forth the requirements

for acceptance. The basis of the sinner's acceptance is the work of Christ appropriated by faith. A true and living faith will result in God-fearing and righteous conduct. A man does not fear God and perform righteous works *in order to be saved*. Rather, a saved man fears God and performs righteous works *because he is saved*. Peter is here describing the result of salvation, not the requirement of salvation. In verse 43 Peter will make it clear that the requirement of salvation is faith in Jesus Christ.

Cornelius and perhaps some in his household believed in God and were "saved," but only in an Old Testament sense. Peter preached to him the gospel of Christ, and once he believed this message, he was then saved in the New Testament sense, with all that this entails (the knowledge of the once-for-all judicial forgiveness of sins, eternal life with the knowledge and fellowship of the Father and the Son, death to the old man and sin in the flesh, membership in the body of Christ, the indwelling and sealing of the Spirit, an unsurpassable standing, position and nearness before the Father in the risen Christ in the heavenlies, etc.). The fact that Cornelius and those with him needed to be saved in the fullest sense is made clear in Acts 11:14: "Who shall tell thee words, **whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.**"

Acts 10:36

Peter echoed the great message which the angels announced in Bethlehem, "Peace on earth" (Luke 2:14). Christ is the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). He is the only One who can break down that wall between men and God, between Jew and Gentiles. He is the only One who can bring peace to this world. Only the Lord Jesus can solve the stupendous problems of wars and rumors of wars and violence and terrorism on this planet. No one but He can do it, because He is Lord of all! In our own lives, He is not Lord at all unless He is Lord of all! He needs to be Lord over every area of our lives. He can also provide "peace with God" for the sinner who believes in Him. We who were enemies of God can now be at peace with God because of what Christ has accomplished in His ministry of reconciliation (Rom. 5:1-11).

In this particular context, the expression "Lord of all" probably means "Lord of all [nations]." He was not just Lord over the Jewish nation. He was Lord over the Gentile nations as well: "Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also" (Rom. 3:29).

Peter's message was filled with universal language. Peter was beginning to understand that the gospel was to go forth to all men of every nation:

Verse 34—"In every nation."

Verse 36—"Lord of all" (not just Lord of the Jews)

Verse 37—"whosoever" (embracing people of all nations)

Acts 10:37

"That word ye know." This is interesting. Peter states that they already knew about Jesus. They knew about what He did and said. This is quite a statement to say to a Roman centurion and those gathered with him. "You Romans have been here long enough to see and to hear about things that happened with Jesus of Nazareth. I'm filling you in with the details as to how this applies personally to you, but you are familiar with the Christ I am telling you about."

These brief words may be looked upon as a summary of the Gospel of Mark which Peter helped Mark to write. This statement reflects the order of events in Mark's gospel. He begins with John the Baptist's ministry (Mark 1; see Acts 10:37) and ends with the Lord's death and resurrection (Mark 15-16; see Acts 10:39-40).

Peter was an example to all preachers of the gospel because his message was Christocentric. From beginning to end he preached Christ. Even as Paul said, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord" (2 Cor. 4:5).

Acts 10:38

God anointed Jesus, even as Isaiah 61:1 had predicted. "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me because **the Lord hath anointed Me** to preach good tidings to the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." These very words Jesus preached at His home synagogue in Nazareth, for which He was nearly murdered (Luke 4:18). "Anointed" means enabled, empowered by the Spirit of God. You and I have also been anointed according to 1 John 2:20—"You have received an anointing of the Holy One and you know these things." You understand these things because God has enabled you by the Holy Spirit to understand His revealed truth.

The Lord Jesus was uniquely anointed and enabled by the Holy Spirit. He went around doing good and healing those who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him in a special way, as God's unique Son.

Acts 10:39-40

"Whom they slew and hung on a tree." Peter describes the death of Christ by using the term "tree" instead of the word "cross." In his epistles, Peter does not use the word "cross" but again used the term "tree"—"Who His own self bore our sins in His own body **on the tree**" (1 Pet. 2:24). Probably Peter had Deuteronomy 21:23 in mind—"for he that is hanged [upon a tree] is accursed of God" (see also Gal. 3:13).

God raised up His Son on the third day. The whole Bible is structured chronologically. It starts with six literal days of creation and ends with a thousand literal years of kingdom rule. The kingdom is preceded by seven literal years of unprecedented tribulation, divided into two literal three and a half year segments of 1260 days or 42 months each. The entire structure of Biblical history and prophetic events is based on precise chronology.

In the midst of God's chronological program for the ages are three days. On the first day (Friday) He died and paid the great price of our redemption; on the second day (Saturday) He was in the grave; on the third day (Sunday) He rose again from the tomb. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9). He was raised again on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:4). He really rose again bodily. It was a genuine historical event. Chronology is the backbone of history and apart from history there is no theology. Thank You, Lord, for reminding us that something happened in history to a real Person at a real place in real time.

God showed His risen Son openly (v. 40), even to over 500 on one occasion (1 Cor. 15:6).

Acts 10:41

The risen Christ did not appear openly to all people but to certain witnesses of whom Peter was one. Peter and his companions actually ate and drank with Jesus after He had risen from the dead (Luke 24:41-43; John 21:9-13). Interestingly, Acts 10:41 is the only place that we are explicitly told that they also “drank” with the risen Lord. This is not recorded in any of the Gospels. He proved to these men that He was not a mere spirit or ghost, but that He had a genuine resurrection body which could be touched and which could partake of food and drink. The same point is made in Acts 1:4, “being assembled together with them” or literally “eating with them” (see the Greek text and many translations). This was a very important means by which Jesus revealed Himself. He was not just a theophany (an appearance of God), as He was in the Old Testament; He was a physical being, one Person possessing two natures (Human and Divine).²¹ Part of His humanity was His physical body. He could actually eat with people after He rose from the dead. “This, of course, shows that the Savior’s resurrection body was tangible, material, and physical.”²²

Acts 10:42

Christ was ordained by God to be the Judge of all men. What a position He was given by the Father! “For the Father...hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22) “And [the Father] hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man” (John 5:27). He is the Son of man, a member of the human race, and therefore believers will face a human at the bema-seat of Christ, and unbelievers will face a human at the Great White Throne judgment. He is not unmindful of our temptations, having Himself been tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He knows all about us—our weaknesses, our failures, our sins—because He, without sin, endured all the things we could ever endure and even more. Therefore, in the mind of God, that is a fair and just way to confront human beings in the last days. God has ordained Him to be the righteous Judge of the world, confirmed by His resurrection from the dead (Acts 17:31).

He is the Judge of the living and the dead! This, of course, includes all Jews and all Gentiles. The God who shall judge them is also the God who is able to save them (John 3:17). Salvation is offered to all; judgment awaits all (all must give account to God), but condemnatory judgment awaits only the unbelievers (Rom. 8:1; John 5:24).

Acts 10:43

²¹In Genesis 18:1-8 even the Lord Jesus (as a theophany) and His two angel companions were all able to eat the food that Abraham provided. Perhaps also add: Though the purpose of eating there was not to demonstrate the possession of actual manhood or “flesh and bones” in bodily resurrection, as it was with our risen Lord.

²²William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, p. 1614.

Whoever believes in Jesus Christ, God's only Savior, will receive the complete forgiveness of sins! What a marvelous salvation promise. Obviously, the invitation to "whosoever" includes Gentiles. The Great Commission was being fulfilled, "And that repentance and **remission of sins** should be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Peter's simple message to these Gentiles was that they needed to believe in Jesus. Faith in Christ was the sole condition of salvation. Peter did not tell them that they needed to be circumcised or that they needed to keep the law of Moses. Faith in Christ was sufficient.

The prophets had a lot to say about Gentiles coming to the Lord for salvation. When Israel officially became a nation at Mt. Sinai, they were to function as a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6), that is, to be mediators between God and the whole human race. They were supposed to be God's means to reach Gentiles. Later on they forgot about that and became self-centered as a nation. This was true especially at the time when Jesus appeared on the scene. But God always wanted them to reach out to Gentiles. Some of the most miserable missionaries in the history of the world were Jews whom God sent to Gentiles, Jonah being a prime example! Jonah was told to go to Nineveh, but Jonah did not delight in witnessing to Gentiles. Instead he wanted the Assyrians destroyed, thinking they did not deserve God's mercy. Consider Naomi, missionary to the Moabites. She was moaning and groaning the whole time she was there. It was amazing that Ruth wanted to worship and follow her God in spite of her mother-in-law's bitter spirit.

This became typical of Jewish missionaries in the Old Testament. But God said that the prophets predicted that the Gentiles would come to the one true living God for salvation. We can imagine Peter saying, "Cornelius, this is why I am here! God wants to reach all men with His message of good news. Thank you for inviting me to this speaking engagement." And the Church has never been the same since. God was opening up the entire Gentile world officially, to be accepted by the Holy Spirit into a personal, living and vital relationship with Christ the Savior.

The thrust and purpose of all the Old Testament prophets in bearing witness to the Messiah, Jehovah-Jesus, was "that every one that believes on Him will receive through His name remission of sins." Of course, some Old Testament prophets explicitly and directly declare that faith in the Messiah will save (e.g., Isaiah and Joel).

Acts 10:44

Perhaps Peter had planned to say many more things, but the Holy Spirit interrupted his message (Acts 11:15) and fell on this group of Gentile believers who had heard the Word. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The baptizing work of the Holy Spirit was taking place, and for the first time Gentiles were placed into the body of Christ (1 Cor.12:13).

Acts 10:45

"Those of the circumcision which believed"—this refers to the six men who had gone with Peter (Acts 10:23; 11:12). These were six Hebrew Christian men who were witnesses of this colossal event, and they were absolutely astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on these Gentiles, just as He had been poured out on the Jews on the day of Pentecost (compare Acts 2:17-

21).²³ The verb “poured out” indicates how abundant and how generous our God is. God is not narrow, not stingy, not in any way limited in His grace which was poured out and now available to the entire human race in a way that had never been true before.

Nicolas was a proselyte to Judaism (Acts 6:5), but Cornelius and those gathered in his house became Gentile Christians without first becoming Jews.

Acts 10:46

Peter and his six Jewish witnesses heard the Gentiles speak in tongues and magnify God. We saw this phenomenon of speaking in tongues take place in Acts chapter 2. Peter and his Jewish comrades were witnessing a Gentile Pentecost!²⁴ In Acts 8, when the Samaritans came to know the Lord through the ministry of Philip, confirmed by Peter and John, it does not say they spoke in tongues. Yet tongues-speaking may have occurred because that was step two in the ever-widening circle of the new dispensation which was being inaugurated, namely the Church age.

Here in Acts 10 the Bible specifically says that these Gentiles spoke in tongues. We see this again in Acts 19 as disciples of John the Baptist spoke in tongues. These were born-again men who needed additional knowledge so that they might be brought into the fulness of Christian understanding (the same being true of Apollos in Acts 18:24-26). It was not that they lacked faith, but they lacked knowledge. These were examples of people living up to the light which they had. As they were told new truths about Jesus, they gladly embraced the additional light. It was a normal and expected thing for people in this transition period to accept the new light that came to them. Their entrance into this new relationship with Jesus was sometimes evidenced by speaking in tongues.

People do not speak in tongues today, at least not the tongues-speaking that is described in the Bible (in Acts and in 1 Corinthians). Biblical tongues came to an end in the first century, fulfilling the prophecy, “whether there be tongues, they shall cease” (1 Cor. 13:8). When they spoke in tongues in the household of Cornelius, they magnified God (Acts 10:46)! Their experience of speaking in tongues was honoring to the Lord.

What is Wrong With Modern-Day Tongues Speaking?

1) In Charismatic circles speaking in tongues is set forth as something that everyone should seek, but in the New Testament, the gift of tongues was a spiritual gift that was not given to every believer (1 Cor. 12:8-11, 30). Tongues was a relatively unimportant gift (listed last in 1 Cor. 12:28; see also 12:10), though it did have edificational value if it were used rightly and interpreted properly.

²³The “gift of the Holy Spirit” means “the gift which is the Holy Spirit” (genitive of apposition). The gift they received was the Holy Spirit, and this included His indwelling and baptizing ministries (John 14:16,17,20; 1 Cor. 12:13; etc.).

²⁴“Gentile Pentecost” in the sense that what happened in Acts 10 was very similar to what happened in Acts 2 (see Acts 11:15-17). On the other hand there was only one Pentecost on which the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven and arrived on earth to form the body of Christ and indwell the saved collectively and individually.

2) The Bible gift of tongues was the supernatural and God-given ability to speak in a language which the person had never learned. The modern so-called gift of tongues is an ecstatic, emotional experience of uttering nonsense gibberish which cannot be translated and which does not have any real language content.

3) There is not one command in the entire Bible which tells a believer to speak in tongues. Also, 24 out of 27 books in the New Testament say absolutely nothing about the gift of tongues.

4) The facts of history indicate that the true gift of tongues ceased very early in the history of the Church. There is no verse in the Bible indicating that this gift will reappear in the last days.

5) The gift of tongues was a temporary sign-gift which served its purpose and then was no longer needed, and thus no longer given. It served as a sign of judgment to unbelieving Israel and an indication that God was putting the nation Israel aside and beginning a new program, even His Church. There is no mention of the genuine gift of tongues in the Bible or in secular history after 70 AD (the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans).

6) As previously discussed, the kind of speaking in tongues that takes place today is a known psychological phenomenon which has been practiced by heretical groups, pagans, cultists and non-Christian people throughout the centuries. "Glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, is not restricted to Christian experience. Ecstatic utterances of a divinely inspired nature are mentioned in early Egyptian writings. The oracles of Delphi, Dodona, and Epirus, among many others, which laid claim to prophecy, sometimes through the spirits of the dead, appear to be related to glossolalia. Plato extolled 'four kinds of irrational experience, the divine madness of love, prophecy, Dionysian ecstasy, and poetic intuition,' and both Plutarch and Virgil recorded phenomena similar to glossolalia" [*The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues* by John P. Kildahl (Harper & Row, 1972), p. 11].

7) One expert on the psychological phenomenon of speaking in tongues has come to this conclusion:

I am skeptical of the sociological and psychological aspects of tongue-speech as exhibited in public. Too much of it has been harmful rather than helpful when measured by the criterion of edifying the whole group....Tongues-speaking does not look very uniquely spiritual to me after many experiences of watching people teach other people how to speak in tongues. I have observed the same routine everywhere I have been: (1) a meeting devoted to intense concentration on tongue-speaking, followed by (2) an atmosphere of heightened suggestibility to the words of the tongue-speaking leaders, after which (3) the initiate is able to make the sounds he is instructed to make. It is the same procedure that a competent hypnotist employs. Like the hypnotist, the tongue-speaking leader succeeds with some subjects and with others does not. I have reached the conclusion that tongues-speaking is a learned phenomenon. [*The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues* by John P. Kildahl (Harper & Row, 1972), p. 74]

It is our thesis that hypnotizability constitutes the sine qua non of the glossolalia experience. If one can be hypnotized, then one is able under proper conditions to learn to speak in tongues. While glossolalia is not the same as hypnosis, it is similar to it and has the same roots in the relationship of the subject to the authority figure.

[*The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues* by John P. Kildahl (Harper & Row, 1972), pages 54-55].

8) Much of the speaking in tongues that takes place today is found to be contrary to the rules set forth in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, which is another indication that it cannot be of God. Here are some of the regulations set forth by the Apostle Paul:

No more than three people could speak in tongues on any one occasion (1 Corinthians 14:27).

The tongues-speakers were to speak one after another in succession, not all at once (1 Cor. 14:27).

Whenever tongues-speaking occurred, there had to be the interpretation of the tongues (1 Cor. 14:28).

The women were not to speak in tongues in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:34-35).

In almost any Charismatic assembly today, one will find these rules being violated.

See also Appendix 1, "The Purpose of Tongues in the Assembly."

Acts 10:47

We are reminded by this verse of the Ethiopian eunuch who said something very similar: "Here is water, what hinders me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:36). The message of the Great Commission was made known to all those who placed their faith in Christ (Matt. 28:19). Water baptism did not in itself save people, but it was an act of obedience in God's Great Commission program to give a visual aid to inward spiritual realities, such as Spirit baptism.

These Gentile believers had received the Holy Spirit in a manner strikingly similar to what the Jews experienced on the day of Pentecost. Jews and Gentiles shared together in a marvelous relationship which they had never experienced previously. They were united together into one body, even the Church of Jesus Christ.

Most of us today are Gentile Christians, and Acts 10 symbolizes our wonderful entrance into God's Church, as Gentile believers were made members of the body and bride of Christ for the first time.

Acts 10:48

Peter commanded them to be baptized, not in order to be saved, but in order to give a public testimony of their faith in Christ. Baptism is not something we do in order to be saved; baptism is something that we do because we are saved, in obedience to Christ's command. Water baptism gives a visual picture of what God has done in our hearts.

Jews and Gentiles were united together into one flock, under one Shepherd, as predicted by our Lord in John 10:16.²⁵

In Acts chapters 8-10 there were three amazing conversion experiences which represent all of the human race. In chapter 8 the Ethiopian eunuch was a son of Ham. In chapter 9, Saul of Tarsus was a son of Shem. In chapter 10, Cornelius was a son of Japheth. All of humanity has descended from these three sons of Noah, and the gospel message embraces them all. It was Peter who opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. Paul would be God's primary instrument to reach the Gentiles, by way of his three missionary journeys.

Peter remained with them for a number of days. We are reminded of the Lord Jesus who tarried with the Samaritans for two days (John 4:40). Peter, who formerly would not mingle with Gentiles, was now enjoying blessed fellowship with his Gentile brothers in Christ. The middle wall of partition was being broken down (Eph. 2:13-18). Peter could teach these Gentiles many things based on his personal experiences with the Lord Jesus. Certainly Peter was active in teaching them to observe all things whatsoever Christ had commanded (Matt. 28:20).

There was enmity between Jews and Gentiles, but through Christ and the salvation He offered, this hostility could be eliminated.

Following this wonderful experience of Gentile conversion, there came many sorrows for the Apostle Peter. Why? The Gentiles were rejoicing in their newfound relationship with Christ, but many of Peter's fellow Jews in Jerusalem were not going to be very happy about this, as we shall see in the next chapter. They took great offense that Peter had eaten with and had ministered to the "uncircumcised" (Acts 11:1-3).

William Barclay gives a modern-day example:

A missionary tells how once he officiated at a communion service in Africa. Beside him as an elder sat an old chief of the Ngoni called Manlyheart. The old chief could remember the days when the young warriors of the Ngoni had left behind them a trail of burned and devastated towns and came home with their spears red with blood and with the women of their enemies as booty. And what were the tribes which in those days they had ravaged? They were the Senga and the Tumbuka. And who were sitting at that communion service now? Ngoni, Senga and Tumbuka were sitting side by side, their enmities forgotten in the love of Jesus Christ.²⁶

Peter later gave a concise summary of what had taken place in Acts chapter 10: "Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as He did unto us" (Acts 15:7-8).

²⁵The KJV, in John 10:16, incorrectly translates two different Greek words by the English word "fold." But the second term means "flock" ("there shall be one flock and one Shepherd").

²⁶William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles* [The Westminster Press, 1977], pages 82-83.

Appendix 1

The following is taken from Chapter 9 of George Zeller's book, *God's Gift of Tongues*.

CHAPTER 9

THE PURPOSE OF TONGUES IN THE ASSEMBLY

1 Corinthians 14:21-26

What were tongues for? What was the purpose of this gift? The one place in the New Testament which clearly sets forth the purpose of the gift of tongues is 1 Corinthians 14:22: “Wherefore, *tongues are for* a sign. . . .” The preposition translated “for” (*eis*) here denotes *purpose*. The verse is introduced by the particle “wherefore” (*hōste*), which means “for this reason, therefore.”¹⁶ Paul’s explanation in verse 22 concerning the purpose of tongues is actually an inference based upon his words in verse 21. Therefore, the key to understanding the purpose of tongues must be found in 1 Corinthians 14:21. Verse 21 begins with these important words, “In the law it is written. . . .”

In verse 21 Paul cited an Old Testament passage, Isaiah 28:11-12. Paul knew that the *key* to understanding the Biblical purpose of tongues is found “in the law,” that is, *in the Old Testament Scriptures*. What does

the Old Testament teach concerning tongues? What was the significance and purpose of tongues in Old Testament times? When foreign tongues were spoken, what did this mean? The key which will unlock the purpose and significance of the gift of tongues is found "in the law."

Isaiah 28 is not the only passage in the Old Testament which deals with the significance of foreign tongues. Several such passages together set forth a very sobering Biblical principle—a principle which has been demonstrated repeatedly in history. To discover the significance of tongues in the Old Testament, the following important passages must be considered: Genesis 11, Deuteronomy 28, Jeremiah 5, Isaiah 28 (cited by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:21), and Isaiah 33.

As these passages are examined in detail, the reader is encouraged to discover a pattern and sequence which is repeated again and again. This tragic pattern can be simply summarized as follows:

God has a message for the people.

The people refuse to listen to God.

God causes tongues to be heard as a sign of judgment.

Dispersion follows.

GENESIS 11

In this important chapter describing the judgment upon Babel, *tongues* are mentioned for the very first time. Prior to Genesis 11 tongues (plural) did not exist!

There was only one tongue throughout the inhabited earth: "And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech" (Genesis 11:1). Foreign tongues made their first historical appearance in Genesis 11.

God has a message for the people. Following the great Genesis flood, God gave this simple command to Noah and his sons: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1; cf. Genesis 9:7). How would the descendants of Noah respond to this divine command?

The people refuse to listen to God. Instead of filling the earth as God had said, the people refused to obey. In their opposition to God's Word and God's will, they decided to build a huge tower and make a name for themselves, "Lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4).

God causes tongues to be heard as a sign of judgment. For the first time in history foreign tongues were spoken: "Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (Genesis 11:7). God's judgment fell upon a disobedient and godless people.

Dispersion followed. "So the Lord scattered them abroad from there upon the face of all the earth" (Genesis 11:8).

DEUTERONOMY 28

The Lord communicated His will to the nation Israel by giving the people His holy law. God set before

them a blessing and a curse: a blessing if they would obey the commandments of the Lord, and a curse if they would disobey (Deuteronomy 11:26-28). The blessings and the curses that would come upon the nation are clearly enumerated in Deuteronomy 28.

God has a message for the people.

And it shall come to pass if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all His commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth; And *all these blessings* shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God" (Deuteronomy 28:1).

The people refuse to listen to God.

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command thee this day; that *all these curses* shall come upon thee, and overtake thee (Deuteronomy 28:15).

God causes tongues to be heard as a sign of judgment. One of the curses which the Lord promised to bring upon His disobedient people was the terrible invasion of a conquering nation. As the foreigners would approach, Israel would hear the strange tongues of the enemy:

The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; *a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand* (Deuteronomy 28:49).

Dispersion follows.

And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind (Deuteronomy 28:64-65).

JEREMIAH 5

God has a message for the people. Through the Prophet Jeremiah, the Lord pleaded with His people Israel that they might turn from their evil ways and return to the Lord their God: “If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the LORD, *return unto Me*” (Jeremiah 4:1; cf. Matthew 11:28). God would have done so much if they had simply turned to Him (Psalm 81:8-16)!

The people refuse to listen to God.

O LORD, are not Thine eyes upon the truth? Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; Thou hast

consumed them, but *they have refused to receive correction*: they have made their faces harder than a rock; *they have refused to return* (Jeremiah 5:3).

God causes tongues to be heard as a sign of judgment. When a people refuse to come to God, judgment must inevitably follow. The forbearance and long-suffering of God must someday come to an end. If Israel would not respond to Jeremiah's warnings, then God would speak to the nation in a way they would never forget. Though they could not understand the strange tongues of their invaders, the message of their swords would be long remembered:

Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, *a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say* (Jeremiah 5:15).

Dispersion follows.

And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say, Wherefore doeth the LORD our God all these things unto us? then shalt thou answer them, Like as ye have forsaken Me, and served strange gods in your land, *so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not yours* (Jeremiah 5:19).

For Israel, to be in the promised land was a sign of God's blessing. To be out of the land, scattered and persecuted, was a sure indication that they were under God's curse.

ISAIAH 28

In his important discussion concerning the purpose of the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:21-22), the Apostle Paul cites Isaiah 28:11-12 as evidence that tongues was given as a sign “to them that believe not.” A proper understanding of this important Old Testament passage is crucial in determining the Biblical purpose of tongues.

In Isaiah 28:9-10 ungodly Jews were apparently mocking the message of God’s prophet, Isaiah. They were expressing their indignation at Isaiah’s infantile teaching methods! They questioned, “Does he take us grave and revered seigniors, priests, and prophets, to be babies just weaned, that he pesters us with these monotonous petty preachings, fit only for the nursery, which he calls his ‘message?’”¹⁷

Isaiah’s message was clear and simple and even monotonous! Line upon line, line upon line. . . . Sin brings judgment, sin brings judgment. . . . Turn to God, turn to God. . . . Isaiah used the Chinese water-torture technique of teaching: drop, drop, drop . . . sin, sin, sin . . . judgment, judgment, judgment . . . repent, repent, repent. . . . So it is not a surprise that his hearers began to say, “Who do you think we are, Isaiah? Babies? To whom do you think you are lecturing? Your repetitious preaching is fit for infants: “*Sav lasav sav lasav, kav lakav kav lakav, ze’er sham ze’er sham*” (see NASV marginal note). These unbelieving Jews rejected God’s message, they rejected God’s messenger, and they re-

jected God's messenger's teaching methods.

The Lord responded to their unbelieving scoffing by imitating their mockery and setting forth the unintelligible language of a foreign conqueror (verse 11). God first spoke to them through Isaiah's clear and simple message. Now He will speak in *judgment* to them through a foreign tongue. He will speak to them with stammering lips and *another* (different, strange, foreign) tongue (cf. Acts 2:4 and 1 Corinthians 14:21—"other tongues").

These people closed their ears and refused the proclamation of a heavenly message. God then became, as it were, a barbarian to these people. The Assyrian tongue, which soon surrounded the Israelites, must have sounded to them like the lisping of children. It was a much less cultivated language than Hebrew, and had only the three basic vowels: a, i, and u. Because they would not hear words of comfort in their own language, they had to hear the enemy's harsh sounds.¹⁸

God graciously would have given the people the *rest* that is found in Himself (cf. Matthew 11:28; Isaiah 30:15-17; Psalm 81:8-16), but they refused to listen. God's wonderful promise of comfort and rest was tragically rejected. The Israelites were sick and tired of Isaiah's repetitive assertions that sin was rampant, judgment was coming, and a return to God was the only answer.

Finally, in verses 11-13 Isaiah tells these mockers that God will indeed speak to this people. This time His message will not come through Isaiah, but through a foreign tongue. When the enemy would enter their

borders, killing many, and taking others captive, they would begin to get the message! Once again the terrible pattern is repeated:

God has a message for the people.

To whom He said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing (Isaiah 28:12).

The people refuse to listen to God.

Yet they would not hear (Isaiah 28:12).

God causes tongues to be heard as a sign of judgment.

For with stammering lips and another tongue will He speak to this people (Isaiah 28:11).

Dispersion follows.

That they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and *snared, and taken* (Isaiah 28:13).

ISAIAH 33

To the nation Israel, foreign tongues was a sign of God's judgment and curse upon them. Likewise, the *absence* of foreign tongues is a sign that the nation

is under the blessing of God.

In Isaiah 33:17 Israel is given a wonderful promise concerning the future millennial kingdom: "Thine eyes shall see the king in His beauty." Certainly, during the kingdom age, Israel will enjoy God's richest blessings! No longer will they be under God's curse. Never again will they be invaded by foreign nations. They will dwell safely and securely in the land of promise, protected by the King Himself. Thus, the absence of foreign tongues will be a sign of God's abundant blessing upon the nation:

You will no longer see a fierce people, a people of unintelligible speech which no one comprehends, of a stammering tongue which no one understands" (Isaiah 33:19 NASV).

THE PATTERN REPEATED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Those who fail to learn from the lessons of history are bound to repeat its mistakes. The Assyrian and Babylonian captivities should have taught Israel a lesson. On the pages of the New Testament, however, the same disastrous pattern emerges.

God has a message for the people.

Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28; cf. Jeremiah 4:1; Isaiah 28:12).

The people refuse to listen to God.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and *ye would not* [you were not willing, you refused] (Matthew 23:37).

God causes tongues to be heard as a sign of judgment. The Lord Jesus predicted the terrible judgment that would come upon the nation which had refused God and rejected His Messiah:

Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. . . . Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down (Matthew 23:38; 24:2).

The destruction of Jerusalem took place in 70 A.D. as the city was invaded by the Roman armies, led by General Titus. For the next two thousand years the living God would not dwell in a temple made with hands, but He would dwell in a unique body of believers, and in each member in particular (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19). God's program was shifting from Israel to the Church.

Years earlier God had caused foreign tongues to be spoken and heard as a judgmental sign to the nation Israel (Acts 2; 10; 19, etc.). For those Jews who were familiar with their Old Testament, the sounds of foreign

tongues gave no cause for rejoicing! Tongues were a sign of God's curse, not of God's blessing. Tongues signified a coming invasion, and conveyed an ominous message of rebellion, judgment, and dispersion. When God spoke in tongues, the Jews understood the message (Isaiah 28:11; 1 Corinthians 14:21). Tongues were a sign-gift, given to an unbelieving, Christ-rejecting nation:

“Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not” (1 Corinthians 14:22).

Dispersion follows. The nation Israel has been scattered throughout the world for nearly two thousand years! They have been out of the land, severely persecuted, and God's curse has been upon them: “*His blood be on us, and on our children*” (Matthew 27:25). Although a small remnant has returned to the land, the nation is still without a temple and there is no rest or peace in the land. The destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D. was something from which the nation of Israel has never recovered!

THE DURATION OF TONGUES

When did tongues cease? If foreign tongues were really a *sign of coming judgment* upon the nation Israel, then once this judgment had come, the sign-gift would no longer be necessary. Any Jew who knew his Old Testament should have recognized foreign tongues as a solemn warning of coming judgment. Once the judg-

ment had come, the warning sign was no longer needed!

God graciously waited four decades following the crucifixion of His Son (Israel's rejected Messiah) before He brought final judgment upon the nation. But in 70 A.D. the Romans under General Titus brought the Christ-rejecting nation to its final ruin. Ever since A.D. 70 there has been no question that Israel as a nation is under the judgment of God. The Jews have been forced out of the land. They have been scattered and persecuted throughout the world. It is obvious that God is no longer working through His chosen *nation*. His program has now shifted and God's witnesses are among all *nations*. The Jews are *out of the land*, a definite sign that they are now under God's curse (cf. Deuteronomy 28).

In every nation where they have been scattered they constantly hear foreign tongues (Russian, German, English, etc.) as a continual reminder to them that they have refused the blessing and rest of God. Interestingly enough, not one book in the New Testament was written in the language of the Jews. Not only did God shift from Israel to the Church, but He also shifted from Hebrew to Greek as the language through which He would give His Word! God has not cast away His people Israel (Romans 11:1), but He has cast them aside for a time. The final and ultimate event which marked Israel's judgment was the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., an event that was predicted by our Lord forty years before (Matthew 23:38; 24:2).

Therefore, it must be concluded that tongues as a

sign-gift were no longer needed after 70 A.D. *Tongues must have ceased on or before 70 A.D.* The last historical mention of the gift of tongues is in 1 Corinthians which was written about 55 A.D. There is no evidence historically that the genuine gift of tongues ever occurred after 70 A.D. Tongues served their purpose, and *tongues ceased*, even as God had predicted through the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 13:8).

Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe (1 Corinthians 14:22).

As previously noted, tongues were a *sign* for the unbelieving, rebellious, Christ-rejecting nation of Israel. The *believers* in the Corinthian assembly needed to understand the purpose of tongues, but much more they needed to avail themselves of the gift of prophecy, which is valuable towards edification and exhortation and comfort (verse 3). Not only is prophecy of value for believers, but prophecy is also of value for potential believers (those visiting the assembly), as Paul explains in verses 23-25.

It is important to realize that the unbelievers mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:21-22 are very different than the unbelievers mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:23-24, even though the same Greek word is used (*apistos*). In verses 21-22 Paul describes rebellious and disobedient unbelievers, who heard God's message but then refused

it and even rejected the God who gave it. These were unbelievers who would not hear God (1 Corinthians 14:21). They stubbornly refused God's gracious offer of rest (Isaiah 28:12). These were unbelievers who belonged to "this people" (1 Corinthians 14:21; Isaiah 28:11), which in the context of the Isaiah passage can refer only to the people of Israel, the Jews. Tongues were a foreboding sign of coming judgment for an unbelieving nation who would not listen to their God.

But the unbelievers described in 1 Corinthians 14:23-24 are in marked contrast to the rebellious, God-rejecting Jews just mentioned. These were unbelievers who had come into the assembly. Paul was most likely thinking of unbelieving Gentiles who decided they would visit the Corinthian church and see what was going on there. They were willing to come and to listen to whatever the church had to offer. Apparently these unbelievers were seekers. In fact, they were *potential believers!* Paul knew that the one thing potential believers need more than anything else is prophecy, not tongues.

The Bible teaches, in 1 Corinthians 14:22, that tongues served as a judgmental sign to the nation Israel.¹⁹ Does this mean that wherever tongues were spoken, there had to be unbelieving Jews present? Such a position is very problematic. Why would a rebellious, Christ-rejecting Jew be present at a church service in Corinth? Assembling with Christians would be the last thing he would want to do. Also, there were no unbelieving Jews present in Acts 10 or Acts 19, when the tongues-speaking occurred. The Bible never says that unbelieving

Jews must be present whenever tongues are spoken, and Paul did not include this in his list of regulations in 1 Corinthians 14:27-35.

But then could tongues serve as a sign to the Jews? It should be understood that the unbelieving Jews in the Roman empire knew about the Christian church. They were conscious of the Christian community in their midst. The Christians were the talk of the synagogue! Indeed, the Jews were very much aware of the fact that some of these Christians had the amazing ability to speak in foreign languages—languages that they had never learned. They had at least heard of this amazing phenomenon.

How can it be said that the unbelieving Jews were aware of the gift of tongues? It is important to think back to the day in which the Church first began and tongues were first heard. On the day of Pentecost there were assembled Jews “from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5-6). These Jews all witnessed the gift of tongues in operation. Many of them believed the gospel as Peter preached it, but many did not (compare the “mockers” of Acts 2:13). As these Jews returned to their homes they must have told their kinsmen about the remarkable things which they saw and heard. One can almost imagine such a conversation:

“Have you heard what went on at Jerusalem? The followers of Jesus of Nazareth were claiming that their leader had come back from the dead. On the day of Pentecost the most amazing thing happened! They spoke in foreign languages. It was remarkable! The men who

spoke in these tongues were Galileans!”

Many years go by and then: “Do you remember when you told me about that tongues-speaking in Jerusalem? Well, certain Christians have started meeting in our city and I have heard a report that some of them speak in foreign languages also!”

It is not necessary to be present in a church to know what takes place there. Reports go out and word gets around! In the days of the early Church people were aware, at least to some degree, of what was taking place in the Christian assemblies. The same was true in Old Testament times. When the Assyrians or Babylonians came to invade the land, the news was spread quickly. The Jews did not need to see their enemies and hear them speak to know that they were coming!

In 1 Corinthians 14:22, the Greek article precedes the word “tongues” in verse 22 and is very significant. It is an article of previous reference (pointing back to what has just been mentioned).

“Wherefore *the* tongues are for a sign.”

“What tongues are you talking about, Paul?”

“The tongues I just finished talking about in verse 21, namely foreign tongues.”

Thus if the tongues in verse 21 are foreign languages (Isaiah 28), then the tongues in verse 22 (the Corinthian tongues) must be the same thing.

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say

that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth (1 Corinthians 14:23-25).

In order for the Corinthian assembly to have an effective testimony before the lost, its members must manifest the life of Christ. The world needs to see a healthy, growing *organism* (not organization). The number one characteristic of an organism is that it possesses life. The local church is animated by the very life of God (cf. 1 Timothy 3:15—"the assembly of the *living God*"). The assembly is pulsating with God's life because it is indwelt by the living Christ (Colossians 1:27).

During our Lord's incarnate life and ministry here upon the earth, *God was manifested in the flesh!* But the great mystery that thrilled the heart of the Apostle Paul is that *today* God is incarnate in a body upon this earth (1 Timothy 3:15-16; Colossians 1:26-27). Christ now has a body on the earth, in addition to His resurrected body in Heaven.

The world cannot see Christ directly, because He is in Heaven, but it can see His body which is upon the earth—a living organism manifesting the heavenly, resurrected life of Christ! The Head is in Heaven, but the body is upon the earth, for the purpose of bearing witness to the Head! And there is only one way that

the world can see Christ today. It must see “*Christ in you!*” (Colossians 1:27) It must see Christ in the Church, because Christ is today manifesting Himself in a body, which is His Church, “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:23). How precious the assembly must be to the Lord!

According to Colossians 1:27-28, there is only one way that the living Christ can truly manifest Himself in and through the assembly. *Every* single member of the body must be warned, *every* single body member must be taught, and *every* single member of the body must be well fed! When the members are well fed, then the body is going to be healthy; when the body is healthy, then the life of Christ will be manifested, sinners will be convicted, and God will be glorified!

In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul describes the local Church as the house of God, indicating that the Most High God lives and dwells in the assembly. What a marvel—the indwelling presence of the living God in the Church! If the expression, “house of God” (*oikos theou*) were to be translated into Hebrew, the resultant word would be *Bethel* (*Beyt-el*). If one is ever going to understand the New Testament “Bethel” (1 Timothy 3:15), then he must first realize what Jacob discovered about the Old Testament Bethel in Genesis 28.

When Jacob awoke from his dream, he exclaimed, “Surely *the LORD is in this place*; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! *this is none other but the house of God*. . . . And he called the name of that place *Bethel*” (Genesis 28:16-19).

“The LORD is in this place” and Jacob did not even realize it! And those who belong to the New Testament Bethel often fail to realize this very thing. Paul wrote to the Corinthian “Bethel” and said, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16) God dwells in the assembly. The Church is the habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22).

Ephesians 4:11-16 makes it very clear that God's priority is a healthy organism. In 1 Corinthians 14 (especially verses 3,4,5,12,17) it has been noted that the body of believers must be edified and healthy. The world needs to see a healthy assembly, not a sick one!

What will happen when an unsaved person comes into an assembly that is functioning *contrary* to the principles of edification? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 14:23. He will say, “This is a madhouse! These people are out of their minds!” But what a difference when he comes into an assembly that is functioning according to principles of edification (verses 24-25). Now he sees a healthy organism, and he sees Christ-like saints! So, falling down on his face he will worship God and say, “God is in these people. God is in this place. How dreadful is this place. This is none other than the house of God. This is not a madhouse. This is the house of God! Bethel.”

Is this what unbelievers notice as they come into local churches today? Do they see a healthy organism? Do they see well-fed members? Do they see “Christ in you”? Are they convicted by the awesome Presence

and Person of God?

The greatest testimony before the world results when the local church functions as an “edificational center,” not as an “evangelistic center.” The greatest need today is for a lost world to see the Lord Jesus Christ manifesting Himself in and through a healthy assembly of believers. This cannot be produced by preaching “John 3:16” salvation sermons every Sunday. The saints need nothing less than a steady diet of the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-32; Matthew 28:20; 2 Timothy 4:1-2; etc.).

How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying (1 Corinthians 14:26).

Paul now gives the summarization of the last twenty-five verses. “*Let all things be done unto edifying.*” In contrast, the motto of many “soul-winning” churches today seems to be, “Let all things be done unto evangelism.” But the Apostle Paul realized that a lost and dying world needs to see Christlike believers who understand and practice God’s Word. When God’s people are fully equipped for the work of the ministry (Ephesian 4:11-16), they certainly will not be lax in gospel outreach, nor allow mission programs to suffer. When a church makes its priority that of edification, then true evangelism cannot help but be enhanced, as 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 illustrates so well.

Interestingly enough, the cults do not establish evangelistic centers. Rather they establish edificational centers to train their people to go out and do the work of the ministry. The people are immersed in a program of total indoctrination. The average Jehovah's Witness, for example, is ready always to give an answer to every man that asks him a reason of the false hope that is within him. The average Bible believer is horribly ignorant of God's truth. The devil knows what system really works! The cults do not lack for converts.