

God does not show favouritism.

Ten years after the ascension of Christ and his command to "go and make disciples of all nations" and be "witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Mt 28:19; Acts 1:8), the mission to the Gentiles - to the nations who are not Jewish - has not yet started.

The blame has to be placed on the understanding of the division between Jew and Gentile prescribed by their interpretation of the Old Testament Law that forbade almost all contact with Gentiles. Gentiles, like us, were considered unclean and all forms of contact with Gentiles, to accept their hospitality and sit at table with them, was intolerable.

Acts 10 is about God bringing an end to this idea of unclean people. Two people play out God's message to the church, namely Peter - a preacher but a Jew and Cornelius a religious man who feared the God of Israel, but a Gentile.

Cornelius, though a Gentile, had very impressive religious credentials: he feared God, gave generously, and prayed constantly. Nevertheless, there was something lacking in his faith, and his religion was not good enough: it was still necessary for him to believe in Christ Jesus.

The other main human actor in our story is Peter. We know him as an impatient follower of the Lord. He also was a man stuck on tradition and culture.. His traditions and culture would not allow him to actively begin a mission to the Gentiles.

One day about lunch time Peter was standing on the roof waiting for his food to be prepared, for he was very hungry (vs 10). It was then that Peter had a vision of a cloth coming out of the sky filled with all kinds of creatures - all of them ceremonially unclean according to the dietary laws of the Jews. A voice from heaven said, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat" (vs 13). Peter replied, "Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean" (vs 14). Then the most interesting and marvellous words come to Peter: "*Do not call anything impure that God has made clean*" (vs 15).

God is from beginning to end the main actor and director of this story. It is God who breaks down the barrier of human tradition and culture. It is God who initiates the Gentile mission and brings Cornelius into the church as a full member. It was God who took steps to let also the Gentiles hear about the death and resurrection of Christ.

Peter parted with his traditions and culture because of the Lord's leading. It was God's Spirit which allowed Peter to make the leap from impure or unclean food to impure or unclean people. So Peter himself says, "*God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean*" (vs 28). That Peter learned the lesson is obvious from what he says: "*I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism*" (vs 34). God has no favourites. He does not favour one culture over another and one person over another!

There are still Christians with the same fears and desires as were in Peter and the Jewish Christians. They too want to protect themselves from those they consider to be "unclean."

When God's people think and act like this, God's marvellous and loving words to the nations come back to us, "*Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.*"

At CPC we do not act this way. How thankful I am that this congregation know that we are to be a living testimony of the unity of Christ's people, in spite of cultural diversity and other differences. We are warm, loving, and accepting of all those who walk in our doors. I believe that we, like Peter, know the truth about God: that he does not show favouritism but accepts every person who fear him and follow our Lord Jesus.

This truth is personally important for me and for you. For if God did show favouritism, then none of us would be or could be saved. So, always make room for others in the church. May we never think that we re favoured by God above others.

Instead, let's celebrate the diversity of Christ's body.